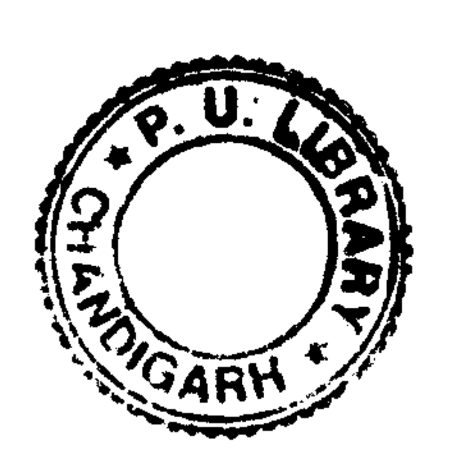
THE AGRARIAN SYSTEM UNDER THE DELHI SULTANATE (1206-1555 A.D.)

Thesis

Submitted to the Panjab University, Chandigarh
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in the
FACULTY OF ARTS
2003



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PREFACE

Indian historiography is essentially an Islamic heritage. Along with the establishment of the Turkish rule was planted the Persian rather than Arabic tradition of historiography in India. The chroniclers of early medieval India were interested primarily in recording military and political exploits and seldom paid adequate attention to the socio-economic conditions of the people. Economic history, thus, for long remained a peripheral feature of Indian historiography.

Recent scholarship on medieval Indian history, however, has begun to lay considerable emphasis on social as well as economic history. It was W.H. Moreland whose pioneering works on economic historiography of medieval India drew attention to the primacy of economic factors in history. His first work was *The Agriculture of the United Provinces* (1904) and the second, *The Revenue Administration of the United Provinces* (1911) which were preparatory to his subsequent main works; *India at the Death of Akbar* (1920), *From Akbar to Aurangzeb : A Study in Indian Economic History* (1923) and *The Agrarian System of Moslem India* (1929). He felt that in India the agriculture and revenue departments were so important that all other departments were merely auxiliary to them.

Other works indicating the dominant role of economic forces followed : H.L. Chablani, *The Economic Conditions of India During the Sixteenth Century* (1929); K.M. Ashraf, *Life*

and Conditions of the People of Hindustan 1200-1500 (1935); Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707* (first published 1963, second revised edition, 1999); Radhakamal Mukherjee, *Economic History of India 1600-1800* (n.d.); H.K. Naqvi, *Urban Centres and Industries in Upper India 1556-1803* (1968); N.A. Siddiqui, *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals* (1970); H.K. Naqvi, *Urbanisation and Urban Centres Under the Great Mughals* (1971); A.I. Chicherov, India : *Economic Development in the 16^{th}-18^{th} Centuries* (1971); S. Nurul Hasan, *Thoughts on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India* (1971); Jagdish Narayan Sarkar, *Studies in Economic Life in Mughal India* (1975); Tapan Raychaudhuri and Irfan Habib edited, *The Cambridge Economic History of India Vol. I 1200-1750* (1982); Satish Chandra, *Medieval India : Society, the Jagirdari Crisis, the Village* (1982); H.K.Naqvi, *Agricultural, Industrial and Urban Dynamism Under the Sultans of Delhi 1206-1555* (1986); Shireen Moosvi, *The Economy of the Mughal Empire c. 1595; A Statistical Study* (1987); Jagdish Narayan Sarkar, *Mughal Economy, Organisation and Working* (1987); M.A. Farooqi, *The Economic Policy of the Sultans of Delhi* (1991); Tripta Verma, *Karkhanas Under the Mughals from Akbar to Aurangzeb : A Study in Economic Development* (1994); Vijay Lakshmi Labh, *Contributions to the Economy of Early Medieval India* (1996); Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ed., *Money and Market in India 1100-1700* (1998); Irfan Habib, *The Economic History of Medieval India : A Survey* (2001) and Zahiruddin Malik,

Agrarian System in Medieval India : Land Revenue Arrangements in Sarkar Shahabad (Bihar) 1734-1790 (2001).

Agrarian System, particularly the assessment and collection of land revenue constitutes an important part of medieval economy. Agrarian history would generally help in improving our understanding of the general history of the period. Agrarian system deals not only with land revenue administration but also with agrarian economy and social structure. The scope of the present study relates to the period 1206 A.D. to 1555 A.D. the period of the Delhi Sultanate extending from the time when Qutbuddin Aibak ascended the throne in 1206 A.D. till 1555 A.D. when the Mughal emperor Humayun reestablished himself at Delhi after overthrowing the last of the Sur monarchs. The Surs have been included in the study since their rule was technically a part of the Sultanate in terms of administration and at the same time, Sher Shah Suri's revenue administration considerably foreshadowed that of Akbar.

A considerable amount of work has been done in the Mughal period of Indian agrarian history but the Delhi Sultanate has not yet received the attention it deserves. It was Irfan Habib's pioneering as well as classic work on the agrarian system of Mughal India, which inspired me to work on the same topic for the Delhi Sultanate. The period of the Sultans needs proper investigation because they emerge as the principal architects of Islamic rule in India that endured uninterrupted till 1707A.D. This thesis is a humble attempt to study the agrarian system

under the Delhi Sultans as a backward projection of Irfan Habib's work.

My aim in this thesis has been two-fold. The first has been to probe into the changes in the agrarian system accompanying the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate and then to highlight these changes within the general dynamics of continuity in the fundamental structure of agrarian life. My second aim has been to delineate and critically examine the agrarian measures introduced by the various Sultans and to determine the extent to which state policy could influence agrarian prosperity or decline. I have taken a comprehensive view of the entire agrarian system encompassing agricultural production and technology, land revenue administration, rural classes, condition of peasantry, revenue assignments and grants, agro-manufactures, agro-related trade, price trends and agrarian crisis vis-à-vis the disintegration of the Sultanate.

I am grateful to the U.G.C. for the award of a fellowship which supported my studies during this period. I am deeply grateful to late Prof. R.C. Jauhri, Department of History, Panjab University for initially suggesting a hitherto less researched topic. I fail to find appropriate words to thank my supervisor, Prof. Kiran Pawar, Department of History, Panjab University for taking a keen interest in my work and painstakingly guiding me at every stage of my endeavour. Her tremendous help, affection and genuine concern prove her a 'Guru' in the real sense of the word. I thank Prof. Indu Banga, Department of History, Panjab University for her suggestions

and Prof. J.S. Dhanki for his help and cooperation. Dr. Surinder Singh, Department of History, Panjab University and Dr. Sanjay Subodh, Department of History, Kurukshetra University, provided a lot of help in supplying me with very valuable source material.

I am grateful to the staff of various libraries where most of the research for this thesis was done : the A.C. Joshi Library, Panjab University, Chandigarh; Department of History Library, Panjab University, Chandigarh; Dwarka Das Library, Chandigarh; Panjab Agricultural University Library, Ludhiana; Panjab University Extension Library, Ludhiana; and also for the material on the Seminar on Economic History of Medieval India, 1-3 February 2003, which was received from the Aligarh Muslim University.

I am overwhelmed by the profound love and concern of my parents for my welfare, which instilled in me robust optimism and an indomitable will to continue working even at times when I was exhausted. My brother Amit and sister Kanu shared my enthusiasm, accompanied me in the pursuit of source material and were immensely helpful in giving a final shape to the thesis. I must not forget to thank my typist Mr. Deepak Kumar Verma for having typed the thesis.

Sona Thind
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Dated : 12.3.03

Chapter 1

ANTECEDENTS : SURVEY OF AGRARIAN SYSTEM BEFORE 1200 A.D.

Any researcher who attempts to trace the development of the agrarian system under the Delhi Sultanate is faced with the problem of the absence of any definite starting point. It is clear that the first Islamic conquerors did not impose an entirely foreign system on their Indian subjects : the observed continuity of institutions shows that they took over portions, at least, of the system which they found in operation, and adapted it as time went on to meet changing needs.[1] A pertinent starting point in this context would be to study the fundamental features of the Hindu agrarian system and to attempt a description of how it existed on the eve of the introduction of the Islamic system.

I

For the fundamental features of the Hindu agrarian system, we must turn to the *Dharma Sastras* or Sacred Law. Agriculture was called *Pramrita* - what causes many deaths.[2] According to Manu, "Some declare that agriculture is something excellent, but that means of subsistence is blamed by the virtuous; for the wooden implement with iron point injures the

[1] W.H. Moreland, *The Agrarian System of Moslem India* (1929; New Delhi : Atlantic, 1994) 1.

[2] Manu, *Manava Dharmasastra*, Eng. trans. G.Buhler, *The Laws of Manu*, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XXV (1886; Delhi : Motilal, 1964) IV 4-5, 129.

earth and the beings living in the earth."[3] It was primarily the duty of the *vaisya* to tend cattle and to cultivate land.[4] The class evidently originated in the ordinary peasant tribesman of the *Rig Veda*, but long before the law book ascribed to Manu was composed, *vaisyas* had many other activities. The *sudras*, the humblest of the four classes, had by now taken to agriculture and Manu admitted many other legitimate *vaisya* occupations besides cattle rearing and farming.[5] Generally the law books disapproved of *brahmanas* engaging in agriculture, because it inflicts injury on animals and insects, but this rule was often ignored.

In 'Hindu' India, land formed one of the main heads of revenue, as shown by the *Dharmasastras*, the *Smritis* and the *Arthasastra* literature. For the period immediately following the *Vedic Samhitas* and the *Brahmanas* our sources consist principally of the work on the Art of Government (*Arthasastra*) attributed to Kautilya and the literature of Law-books (*Smritis*). In the sections on Law and Polity comprised in these works, is embodied a mass of rules and principles relating to various branches of royal revenue and expenditure as well as the forms and methods of revenue administration, which together constitute the most systematic account of Hindu public finance that has come down to us.[6]

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[3] Manu, X 84, 420-21.

[4] Vasishtha, *Dharmasutra*, Eng. trans. George Buhler, *The Sacred Laws of the Aryas as taught in the Schools of Apastambha, Gautama, Vasishtha and Baudhayana*, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XIV (1882; Delhi : Motilal, 1965) X, 19, 11; Manu I, 90, 24.

[5] Manu IX, 326 ff, 400.

[6] U.N.Ghosal, *Contributions to the History of the Hindu Revenue System* (Calcutta : Saraswat Library, 1972) 19.

The Sacred Law contemplates an agrarian position similar in essentials to that which we find at the opening of the Islamic period, and not very different from that which persisted to its close. There is the King in his capital, there is the Peasant in his village, and the relations between the King and Peasant give us, at any rate, the skeleton of the system.[7]

Land tax was, as in later times, the main stay of the government revenue. It is referred to in inscriptions, sometimes as *bhagakara* and sometimes as *udranga*.[8] The question whether there was any kind of compulsory taxation of land or land produce in the early *Vedic* period is a controversial one, but a system of compulsory taxation was not slow to appear, as the evidence of the later *Vedic* texts shows.[9] The basic principle that the cultivator must pay a proportion of his produce to the state was universally recognized and the *niti-shastras* freely acknowledge the right of the king to levy it. Thus Gautama justifies the king's levy of taxes on the ground that he is charged with the duty of protecting his people.[10] According to Baudhayana, "Let the king protect his subjects, receiving as his pay a sixth part of their incomes or spiritual merit".[11]

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[7] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 2.

[8] *Bhaga* has generally been explained by scholars as the king's customary share of the produce, which according to *Arthasastra* text is 1/6 and payable to the king.

[9] Pushpa Niyogi, *Contributions to the Economic History of Northern India*, (Calcutta : Progressive, 1962) 177.

[10] Gautama, *Dharmasutra*, Eng. trans. George Buhler, *The Sacred Laws of the Aryas as taught in the Schools of Apastambha, Gautama, Vasishtha and Baudhayana*, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. II (1882; Delhi : Motilal, 1965) II, 4-9, 161-62.

[11] Baudhayana, *Dharmasutra*, Eng. trans. George Buhler, *The Sacred Laws of the Aryas as taught in the Schools of Apastambha, Gautama, Vasishtha and Baudhayana*, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XIV (1882; Delhi : Motilal, 1965) I, 10, 18 I, 199.

Regarding the share of the peasant's produce claimed by the king, there is a difference of opinion among the authorities. The king's share of the produce varies from 1/4 to 1/12 in the *Smritis* and the *Dharmasastras*. Manu states that the king may take the eighth, sixth or twelfth part of the crops.[12] According to Vishnu, the king must take from his subjects as taxes a sixth part every year of the grain.[13] According to Gautama, cultivators must pay to the king a tax amounting to one-tenth, one-eighth, or one-sixth of the produce.[14] This variation must have been due to difference in the quality of land as well as regional and chronological factors.

The king was permitted to take one-third or one-fourth part of the crops in times of distress (*apad*). Thus, "a king who, in times of distress takes even the fourth part of the crops, is free from guilt, if he protects his subjects to the best of his ability".[15] The normal procedure, however, was to charge one-sixth of the produce as the land tax; the tax collectors were often called *Shasthadhikrita*, as in Bengal and Bundelkhand.[16]

Sukra mentions different rates for the different classes of soil as the basis for assessment. The king should realize one-third, one-fourth, or one-half from places which are irrigated by

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[12] Manu VII, 130, 237.
[13] Vishnu, *Smriti*, Eng. trans. Julius Jolly, *The Institutes of Vishnu*, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. VII (1880; Delhi : Motilal, 1965) III, 22, 16.
[14] Gautama X, 24, 227.
[15] Manu X, 118, 427.
[16] A.S. Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India* (1949; Delhi : Motilal, 1977) 270.

tanks, canals and wells, by rains and by rivers, respectively. He should have one-sixth from barren and rocky soils. If the king gets one hundred silver *karsas* from the cultivator, he should give back to him twenty *karsas*.[17] According to *Sukranitisara*, the ruler should always realise his share (revenue) of produce from land according to Prajapati's system; but in times of danger and difficulty, according to Manu's system, not otherwise. Since Manu's standard was lower than Prajapati's, revenue realized according to the former would be higher than that on the latter's system.[18] This may explain the variation in rates to some extent.

As well as the basic land tax several other taxes fell upon the cultivator. Manu states that a fiftieth part of the increments on cattle and gold may be taken by the king and also the sixth part of trees, meat, honey, clarified butter, perfumes, (medical) herbs, substances used for flavouring food, flowers, roots and fruits.[19] Vishnu permits the king to take from his subjects a sixth part of all other seeds; two in the hundred of cattle, gold and clothes; a sixth part of flesh, honey, clarified butter, herbs, perfumes, flowers, roots, fruits liquids and condiments, wood, leaves, skins, earthen pots, stone vessels, and anything made of split bamboo.[20]

The king was supposed to exercise moderation in the collection of taxes. "After due consideration the king shall

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[17] Sukra, *Sukraniti*, Eng. trans. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, 2nd ed. (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1975) IV, 2, 227-232, 148.
[18] *Sukraniti* I, 418-9, 27. According to Prajapati 2500 cubits make one *parivartana* of land, while according to Manu it was equivalent to 3125 cubits.
[19] Manu VII, 130-31, 237.
[20] Vishnu III, 23-25, 16.

always fix in his realm the duties and taxes in such a manner that both he himself and the man who does the work receive their due reward. As the leech, the calf, and the bee take their food little by little, even so must the king draw from his realm moderate annual taxes."[21] Again, "The king should receive rent from the peasant in such a way that he be not destroyed. It is to be realised in the fashion of the weaver of the garland not of the coal merchant."[22] Similarly the *Arthasastra* enjoins the king to protect agriculture from the molestation of oppressive fines, free labour, and taxes (*dandavishtikarabadhaih*); herds of cattle from thieves, tigers, poisonous creatures and cattle disease.[23]

Numerous exemptions and remissions were granted. If people cultivated new lands and dug tanks, canals, wells for their good, the king would not demand anything of them until they realised profit twice the expenditure.[24] *Arthasastra* grants remission of taxes in the following cases : In the case of construction of new works, such as tanks, lakes etc, taxes (on the lands below such tanks) shall be remitted for five years (*panchavarshikah pariharah*). For repairing neglected or ruined works of similar nature, taxes shall be remitted for four years. For improving or extending or restoring water-works overgrown with weeds, taxes shall be remitted for three years. In the case of acquiring such newly started works by a mortgage or

[21] Manu VII, 128-9, 236.
[22] *Sukraniti* IV, II, 222-223, 147.
[23] Kautilya, *Arthasastra*, Eng. trans. R. Shamasastry, 9th ed. (Mysore : Padam, 1988) 48.
[24] *Sukraniti* IV, II, 242-244, 148.

purchase, taxes on the lands below such works shall be remitted for two years. Out of crops grown by irrigation by means of wind power or bullocks (*vatapravartimanandinibandhayatana*) or below tanks, in fields, parks, flower gardens, or in any other way, so much of the produce as would not entail hardship on the cultivators may be given to the government.[25]

The evidence to show that the land tax was usually paid in kind is overwhelming. The very term used to denote it, *bhagakara,* the tax in the form of a share, suggests that it was paid as a part of what was actually produced in the field. In the *Jatakas* the tax collecting officer is called *dronamapaka*, 'the measurer of the corn by the *drona* measure'.[26] Generally, the tax was levied on the gross yield but in a later period in a few cases allowance was made for exceptional expense.

Regarding the machinery of land revenue collection, we get some information from the *Smritis*. Manu requires the king to appoint trusted officials to collect the annual revenue in his kingdom. He also enjoins the king to appoint a lord over each village, as well as lords of 10 villages, lords of 20, lords of 100 and lords of 1000 villages. They would be remunerated as follows :

1. Lord of 1 village - articles which the villagers ought to furnish daily to the king such as food, drink and fuel.

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[25] *Arthasastra* III, 170, 195.

[26] Altekar 271. It appears that cash taxation was introduced in some cases from about the 9th century A.D. These, however, appear to be exceptional cases.

2. Lord of 10 villages - one *Kula* of land (i.e. as much as can be cultivated with 12 oxen).
3. Lord of 100 villages - one village.
4. Lord of 1000 villages - one town.[27]

Along with these may be mentioned the able officials, whom the king, according to Vishnu, is to employ in mines, for the levying of taxes and for his elephants and forests.[28] On the other hand, the *Arthasastra* mentions two high officials called the *samaharta* (collector-general) and the *Sannidhata* (superintendent of accounts) who are practically vested with the immediate control of the whole financial administration. The collector-general shall attend to the collection of revenue from country parts (*rashtra*), forests (*vana*), herds of cattle (*vraja*) besides other heads. Produce from crown lands (*sita*), portion of produce payable to the government (*bhaga*), pasture grounds come under the head of country parts. Cows, buffaloes, goats, sheep, asses, camels, horses and mules come under the head of herds. The *sannidhata* shall look after the erection of treasury, storehouses for grains and for forest products. It is the duty of the *gopa*, village accountant, to attend to the accounts of five or ten villages, as ordered by the collector-general. Likewise, *sthanika*, district officer shall attend to the accounts of one quarter of the kingdom. *Arthasastra* also provides for the appointment of a superintendent of agriculture.[29]

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[27] Manu VII, 80, 115, 118-9, 229-235.
[28] Vishnu II, 16, 15.
[29] *Arthasastra* II, 60-143, 58-163.

There arises the question of ownership of land in ancient India - whether it was owned by the king or the peasant. Manu speaks of the supreme power of the king over the earth when he says that the king is entitled to one half of ancient hoards and metals found in the ground, by reason of his giving protection and because he is the lord of the soil.[30] Bhattasvamin, the medieval commentator on the *Arthasastra*, declares bluntly that the king is the lord of land and water, but that other things are the property of individual landholders. On the other hand, *Arthasastra* differentiates clearly between the crown lands and private lands.[31] Narada states that a householder's house and field are considered as the two fundamentals of his existence. Therefore, let not the king upset either of them; for that is the root of householders.[32] We possess conclusive evidence to show that in the post-Buddhist period at any rate the ownership in cultivable lands was vested in private individuals; the state could not interfere with it except for the non-payment of land tax. What was claimed from the average cultivator was thus not a land rent but a land tax.[33]

On the basis of evidence from the *Jatakas*, it can be said with certainty that sharing, appraisement and measurement existed in India before the Islamic conquest.[34]

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[30] Manu VIII, 39, 259.
[31] *Arthasastra* II, chap. 24, 129.
[32] Narada, *Dharmasastra*, Eng. trans. Julius Jolly, *The Minor Law Books*, Sacred Books of the East, Vol.XXXIII (1889; Delhi : Motilal, 1965) XI, 42, 164.
[33] Altekar 277. For the various views on ownership of land in ancient India, see R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi : Macmillan, 1980) 110-126.
[34] See U.N. Ghoshal, *The Agrarian System of Ancient India* (Calcutta : Calcutta University, 1930) 26-27.

II

When the Turkish military operations started, India was nothing more than a medley of principalities wedded to a policy of eternal hostility and perpetual strife among themselves. The century and a half that followed the exploits of Sultan Mahmud (999-1030) in Hindustan saw the rise of the Rajput kingdoms, the intensification of the caste system and the growing Turkish pressure on the Gangetic plain. The situation created by the operation of these forces in the political and social life of the country paved way for the Ghurid conquest of Hindustan.[35] Of the new Rajput States that dominated the political scene, the Chahamanas ruled in Sambhar & Ajmer, the Paramaras in Malwa, the Kalachuris in Chedi, the Chandellas in Bundelkhand, the Chalukyas in Gujarat, the Gahadvalas in Kannauj, the Palas in Magadha, the Suras, and later the Senas, ruled in Western Bengal. Ambitious rulers of these dynasties constantly disturbed the political equilibrium of the country and strove to impose their suzerainty upon weaker princes. Political anarchy and disunity was, thus, the keynote of Indian political life when the Turks threatened to liquidate the Rajput state-system in India.[36]

Until the tenth century three major dynasties, the Palas of Bengal, the Pratiharas to the north & west, and the Rashtrakutas of the western Deccan, were engaged in a contest

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[35] Mohammad Habib and K.A. Nizami ed., *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol.V (New Delhi : PPH, 1982) 136-37.

[36] Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Religion and Politics in India During the Thirteenth Century*, new ed. (New Delhi : O UP, 2002) 69.

for overall sovereignty. The strength of the Pratiharas[37] prevented an expansion of Arab Muslim power from Sind, conquered by Muhammad bin Qasim's expeditionary force in the early eighth century. During this period, landholding became the chief basis of social and political status. There was an increasing fragmentation and hereditarization of local power under what has been variously termed 'the *Samanta* system' or 'Indian feudalism'. An increasing portion of the agricultural product was taken from the peasantry to maintain military vassals and religious grant-holders, whose tenure generally survived changes of overlords. By the tenth century the consolidation of the powers of smaller local kingdoms or chieftainships is observable, with the proliferation of subordinate 'feudatory' tenures and rights.[38]

The literary and epigraphic sources reveal that from the Gupta period onwards the usage of the term *samanta* became increasingly common in a sense similar to that of vassal, and thus it emerged as the keyword of Indian feudalism. By the seventh century A.D. the *samanta* system had become fairly prevalent. In the *Harshacharita* of Bana many types of *samantas* are distinguished obviously on the basis of their relationship with the overlord. The defeated rulers were reduced to the status of *samanta*, as also those who willingly accepted the vassalage

[37] The Pratihara empire extended from the foothills of the Himalayas to Ujjain in the south and from Gujarat in the west to Mongyr in the east.

[38] Tapan Ray Chaudhary and Irfan Habib, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of India 1200-1750*, Vol. I (Hyderabad : Orient, 1984) 46; For feudal economy in three kingdoms (c. A.D. 750-1000) see Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* 91-109.

of the overlord.

The obligations of the *samanta* included the payment of yearly tributes, rendering homage to the emperor in person with an attitude of humble submission, court attendance with court service and military service. The growth of feudal tendencies is also reflected in the usage of a new term *thakura* or *thakkura* from the ninth century A.D. onwards, which by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries had come to connote chief, warrior, and lord in general. It was mainly applied to the class of ruling landed aristocracy, which, according to the 13th century sources was divided into many grades – *rais*, *ranas* and *rawats*.[39]

The practice of granting revenues and also lands to vassals and high functionaries, along with the right to receive taxes, tolls, contributions etc. and their explicit or implicit authority over the people residing there, had become common by the twelfth century.[40] The grants to religious institutions and *Brahmanas* were made in perpetuity. But as regards the secular grants, the evidence of the *Kathakosa* and the *Lekhapaddhati* suggests that they were generally for lifetime and were explicitly or implicitly conditioned by loyal service. Lands were assigned not only by the king himself but by the members of the royal family such as the prince, the queen the queen mother, as well as

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[39] B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century* (Allahabad : Central Book Depot, 1973) 137. The title *ranaka* and *thakkura* became common feudal epithets in northern India and are applied indiscriminately to officials of different castes and categories. The *rauta* seems to have been a vassal whose dominant function in the state was rendering military service.

[40] Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* 198.

others of high ranks, viz. ministers, *samantas*, *mahasamantas* etc.[41]

The most significant change in the economy of the period was the large-scale transfer cf land revenues and land to both secular and religious elements by princes and their vassals. The process is demonstrated by a large number of charters, which were generally recorded on copper plates.[42] These beneficiaries stood midway between the peasants and the ruler. They not only collected land revenue from the areas assigned to them but discharged miscellaneous administrative duties.[43] The charters authorised the beneficiaries to punish people guilty of ten offences (*sadandadasaparadhaḥ*), including those against family, property and person, and also empowered them to try civil cases.[44] Further, royal officers were not allowed to enter the territory of the beneficiaries and cause any kind of obstruction in their functioning.[45] These non-economic rights thus helped the beneficiaries to exploit their estate peasants economically in an effective manner.

Another significant development in the feudal set up, was decentralization. The territories directly administered by the king became considerably limited, and they almost became like their own *samantas* merely holding larger territories than any

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41 For the categories of assignments see Niyogi 50-70.
42 R.S. Sharma, *Early Medieval Indian Society. A Study in Feudalisation* (Kolkata : Orient, 2001) 186.
43 Satish Chandra, *Historiography, Religion and State in Medieval India* (New Delhi : Har Anand, 1997) 174.
44 Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* 3.
45 Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* 2.

one of them. Ghoshal notices this when he writes that "assignments ... preponderated over the Reserved Tract."[46] This state of affairs was probably true for most of the kingdoms of northern India in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[47] The *Aparajitaprccha* of Bhuvanadeva,[48] classifies the feudatories and vassals in the descending order on the basis of the number of villages held by them.

Designation of *samantas*	Number of villages held
Mahamandalesvara	1,00,000
Mandalika	50,000
Mahasamanta	20,000
Samanta	10,000
Laghu Samanta	5,000
Caturamsika	1,000

Source : Yadava, *Society and Culture* 149.

Thereafter figure the holders of fifty, twenty, three, two and even one village. However, this scheme appears to be theoretical rather than functional.[49] At the top of the structure was the king, whose general authority over land was recognised by numerous epithets used for him in early medieval records.[50]

Thus, by the eleventh and the twelfth centuries the

[46] Ghoshal, *Agrarian System* 57-58.
[47] Yadava, *Society and Culture* 147.
[48] A work on architecture composed in the 12th century.
[49] Yadava, *Society and Culture* 149.
[50] R.S. Sharma," From Gopati to Bhupati (A Review of the Changing Position of the King)", *Studies in Indian History* Vol.2 No.2 (1980) : 1-10.

empires in northern India had become loose superstructures. There were generally five or six main focuses of power throughout the subcontinent, with numerous lesser kingdoms, sometimes independent, sometimes tributary to one of the greater rulers.[51] The economic and political tie between the central government on one hand and local beneficiaries on the other was disrupted by the grant of fiscal and administrative autonomy to the beneficiaries, which gave rise to many fiscal and administrative islands existing by themselves.[52]

The growth of the feudal complex was accelerated by the general economic decline, which resulted after the downfall of the Gupta empire. Trade and urbanism suffered a distinct decline from the seventh to the tenth century.[53] From the sixth century onwards long-distance trade also began to decline. Trade with the western part of the Roman empire ended in the third century and by the sixth century, silk trade with Iran and the Byzantium stopped.[54] Commercial decline is clearly indicated by the paucity of coins. The absence of gold coins in post-Gupta times is in sharp contrast with their abundance under the Kusanas and Guptas.[55] Even silver and copper coinages are scarce and poor.

In the post-Gupta period, organized craft production

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[51] A.L. Basham, ed., *A Cultural History of India* (New Delhi : O UP, 1997) 51.
[52] Sharma, *Early Medieval Society* 186.
[53] Yadava, *Society and Culture* 270-75; M.R. Tarafdar, "Trade and Society in Early Medieval Bengal", *Indian Historical Review* Vol.4 No.2 (1978) 282.
[54] R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India (c.300 – c. 1000)* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1987) 135-138.
[55] R.S. Sharma, "Indian Feudalism Retouched", *Indian Historical Review* Vol.1 No.2 (1974) 323.

also declined. The guilds of craftsmen and merchants which had earlier played an important part in commodity production, became ineffective.[56] The decline of trade led to the decay of towns. From the fourth century onwards, urban sites were in a state of decay and disappearance in northern India.[57] The Chinese pilgrim, Huien Tsang who visited several towns considered sacred on account of their association with the Buddha, found them almost deserted or dilapidated.[58] On account of the decline of trade and towns the villagers had to meet their needs of oil, iron, salt, spices and cloth by themselves either singly or collectively. This created a kind of self-sufficient, closed, agrarian economy.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, however, there is evidence for the increasing use of coins and the revival of trade and commerce. Some new cities, particularly in western India, emerged as centres of trade and the older ones appear to have grown in prosperity.[59] The existence of town or village markets as busy centres of local and interregional trade is revealed by a number of inscriptions.[60] The increasing activities of the Muslim traders in the Punjab and the north-western region led to the revival of external land trade. They became active

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[56] Lallanji Gopal, *Economic Life of Northern India c. A.D.700-1200* (Banaras : Motilal,1965) 81-82.
[57] R.S. Sharma, "Decay of Gangetic Towns in Gupta and Post Gupta Times", *Journal of Indian History*, Golden Jubilee Volume (1973) 135-150.
[58] B.D. Chattopadhyaya, "Trade and Urban Centres in Early Medieval North India", *Indian Historical Review*, Vol.1 No.2 (1974) 216.
[59] Niyogi 158.
[60] Niyogi 162.

sharers in the domestic commerce of the country.[61] Foreign trade by sea routes also seems to have revived and a number of Indian ports are mentioned in foreign accounts.[62] However the range and volume of trade was by no means overwhelming. It has been recognised that well-organised trade and commerce, together with the use of coins, tend to inhibit feudalism. But the *samanta* hierarchy and the lord-vassal nexus do not reveal any marked sign of decline or break up in the twelfth century.[63] On the contrary, Indian feudalism appears to have adapted itself to that particular phase of money economy and other economic developments.

The common revenue terms prevalent in the 12th century northern India appear to be *bhagabhoga kara*, *hiranya* and *dasapradha*. R.S. Sharma states that the increasing number of taxes appearing in later inscriptions indicates a real increase in the fiscal burden on the peasants.[64] The expression *bhagabhoga kara* was often used in a general way to refer to the revenue paid in kind.[65] *Hiranya* has been generally accepted to denote a wealth tax. The *Manasollasa* states that *hiranya* represented the king's share in the hoard of gold capital and cattle wealth amounting to 1/50th of the part thereof.[66] D.C.

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[61] See H.C. Verma, *Medieval Routes of India : A Study of Trade and Military Routes* (Calcutta : Naya Prakash, 1978) chs. 1 to 4; "Trade and Trade Routes in North-West India in the 10th-14th centuries", *Social Science Probings* Vol.4 No.1 (1987) : 91-95.
[62] Niyogi 129-136.
[63] Yadava, *Society and Culture* 141, 282-3.
[64] Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* 265. For these taxes see Gopal 32-70.
[65] Gopal 33.
[66] Yadava, *Society and Culture* 289.

Sircar and B.N.S. Yadava have enumerated the formidable number of taxes and cesses collected from the peasants and artisans.[67] Thus, in the twelfth century, "mostly the peasants appear to have been left with a bare margin for subsistence."[68]

This economic aspect of feudalism in India was intimately connected with the transformation of the *Sudras* into peasants. The transformation of *Sudras* who were mainly slaves and hired labourers in the earlier age into peasants was a significant phenomenon. Inspite of having acquired peasanthood, they continued to bear the hallmark of servitude.[69] The religious ideology of the times emphasized on the confinement of the *Sudras* to the locality of their masters and on their serving the higher *varnas*.[70] These restrictions enabled the landed classes and ruling chiefs in keeping the peasants under subjection. That the peasants were expected to stay in the village made over in gift, can be inferred from the words used in the land charters which commonly enjoin the villagers to pay all dues to the beneficiaries and carry out their orders. The peasants were transferred along with the soil to the beneficiaries and the terms used for the purpose are *dhana-jana-sahita* (together with resources and inhabitants).[71]

The depression and subjection of the peasantry in early

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[67] D.C. Sircar, *Landlordism and Tenancy in Ancient and Medieval India as Revealed by Epigraphical Records* (Lucknow : University of Lucknow, 1969) 66-79.
[68] Yadava, *Society and Culture* 301.
[69] Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* 72.
[70] B.N.S. Yadava, "Immobility and Subjection of Indian Peasantry in the Early Medieval Complex", *Indian Historical Review* Vol.I No.1 (1974) : 20.
[71] Sharma, *Early Medieval Indian Society* 188-89.

medieval India was chiefly the result of the oppressive taxation structure, the practice of the imposition of forced labour (*visti*)[72], and the development of a religious ideology, which sanctioned the bondage of *Sudras*. Another factor that worsened the condition of peasants was the right of subinfeudation. The donees were authorised to enjoy the land, to get it enjoyed, to cultivate it and get it cultivated. These factors may be taken as various modes of extracting surplus from the peasants for the benefit of either the king and / or his secular and religious beneficiaries. They gave rise to new property relations and a new mechanism of economic subordination from which there was no escape.[73]

R.S. Sharma in his work, *Indian Feudalism*, refers to the critical characteristics of feudal formation in early medieval India. First, it is dominated by a class of landlords who claim and collect rent from the peasants on the ground that they are owners of the land. Second, we notice a class of subject peasantry. Obviously every peasant family constitutes the smallest unit of production and after meeting its needs of subsistence pays the remainder to the landlord. Peasants actually possess the land but are compelled to pay the rents in cash, kind or labour to the landlords.[74] Third, the rents and labour services are collected by the landlords not with the object of promoting

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[72] G.K. Rai, "Forced Labour in Ancient and Early Medieval India", *Indian Historical Review* Vol. III No.1 (1976) : 42.

[73] Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* 218-9.

[74] The control of the peasant over land may have varied according to the terms of the grants and their implementations, but basically the peasant was transformed into a tenant of the landlord.

production or the economic growth of the country but mainly for their own consumption. The peasants pay not because of expectations of return but because of custom, coercion, legal sanction and ideological influence. Fourth, the socio-economic formation that we have in early medieval times is the concomitant of a predominantly agricultural economy in which local needs are satisfied locally and in which the scope for functioning of the market system is extremely limited. Naturally in such a society all services, religious, military, political, administrative etc. are remunerated through grant of plots of land in the case of lower functionaries and through grants of revenues from villages in the case of higher functionaries.[75]

The following conclusions can therefore be drawn regarding the agrarian system of northern India prior to the establishment of Turkish rule.

1. The *samanta* system was well established, the kingdoms being loose confederations of *samanta* loyalties. The new state structure was characterized by decentralization and hierarchy. There was a ruralization of the ruling class, a tendency towards its dispersal at each level, and so the creation of hereditary tax-collecting potentates (*samantas*, *thakkuras*, *ranakas*, *rautas* or *rājaputras* etc.) placed one over the other in some hierarchical order.[76]
2. The decentralization of state authority led to major changes in

[75] Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* 213-14.
[76] Irfan Habib, *Essays In Indian History : Towards A Marxist Perception* (New Delhi : Tulika, 1995) 138.

the structure of agrarian relations. The emergence of landed intermediaries was causally linked to the practice of land grants. The peasants were attached to the soil owned by the landed intermediaries, paying rent in kind and labour to them.

3. There was a changeover from the market or money economy to self-sufficient villages as units of production, ruralization thus being an important dimension of the transition process. It may be classified as the Indian version of a feudal economy.
4. The level of taxation was high which is evident from literary and epigraphic evidence. The peasants paid revenue at exorbitantly high rates and were subjected to forced labour. They were left with only a bare margin for subsistence.
5. The peasants were mostly *Sudras* and this was largely responsible for their exploitation and subjection in the early medieval complex. Such a subjection was sanctioned by the religious ideology of the times and enforced by the rigid social order. There are very few incidences of resistance from the *Sudras*.

During this period a major part of the Indian subcontinent was marked by the strong presence of a surplus consuming class which lived off the labour of a subject peasantry on the strength of its superior agrarian authority buttressed by ritualistic and ideological mechanisms.[77]

[77] Sharma, *Early Medieval Indian Society* 118.

Chapter 2

LAND REVENUE AND ITS ADMINISTRATION

The Islamic Kingdom of Delhi dates from the year 1206, when Qutbuddin, the Governor appointed by the king of Ghazni, ascended the throne. His brief reign (1206-1210) is considered significant because it marked the rise of the first independent Turkish ruler in India. At this time, however, India had already obtained some experience of Islamic rule. Apart from the episode of Arab rule in Sind,[1] Afghan kings had maintained governors in Hindustan for more than a century; and since the collection of revenue was an essential part of administration, we must assume that contact between the Hindu and Islamic agrarian systems was established during this period.[2] The Islamic conquerors brought with them the ideas of an agrarian system of their own, the main lines of which were laid down by Islamic law, and were not, in theory, subject to alteration by Kings or Ministers. To relate the Islamic agrarian system with the institutions that the conquerors found in existence, it is imperative to study its main features.

The Turkish conquerors organised the main features of their financial administration on the lines laid down by the

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[1] Commercial and intellectual intercourse between the Arabs and the Indians had existed long before the Arab conquest of Sind. See Tara Chand, *The Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* (Allahabad : Indian Press, 1946) 29-31.

[2] W.H. Moreland, *The Agrarian System of Moslem India* (1929; New Delhi : Atlantic, 1994) 21.

shariat and the *Abassid* tradition.[3] In India, out of four schools of Islamic law, the *Hanafi* school predominated.[4] According to the Islamic jurists, an Islamic state has two sources of revenue : religious tax *(zakat)* payable by Muslims alone, and secular tax (*fay*) realized from non-Muslims.[5] *Fay* is divided into three big sub-heads : *Khams*, *Jiziyah* and *Kharaj*. *Zakat* is payable on gold, silver, herds, merchandise and agricultural produce but only when such belongings reach or exceed a certain limit called a *nisab*. The *zakat* when assessed on value or weight is one fortieth of the property, which should have been in the possession of the owner for at least one year.[6]

Land revenue has always been the backbone of Indian finance. In Islamic states all cultivated land was legally classified for the purposes of assessment of land revenue. The main classifications were *ushri*, *sulhi* and *kharaj*. *Ushri* lands were (i) the lands of *Jazirat-ul-arab*;[7] (ii) all lands whose owners accepted Islam of their own accord and were left in possession of

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[3] The word *Shariat* is the general name given to *Muhammadan* dispensation, and is defined "as that which would not be known had there not been a divine revelation". N.P. Aghnides, *Muhammadan Theories of Finance* (New York : Columbia University,
1917) 23.

[4] Four schools of law are prominent in the history of Islam, the *Hanafite*, the *Malikite*, the *Shafi'ite* and the *Hanbalite*. See Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Religion and Politics in India During the Thirteenth Century*, new ed. (New Delhi : OUP, 2002) 38-39.

[5] Aghnides 200.

[6] Aghnides 249-54.

[7] According to Islamic theory the world at large falls into two parts, the world of Muslims – *dar-ul-Islam* and the world of foes – *dar-ul-harb*. These are supposed to be in a continual state of belligerency, which can be ended only by the absorption of the *dar-ul-harb* by the *dar-ul-Islam* . Non-Muslims living in a Muslim state and paying poll tax called *jiziyah* were called zimmis. See Thomas Patrick Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam* (Delhi : Oriental, 1973) 710-713.

their estates (iii) all lands conquered by force and distributed among Muslim soldiers (iv) habitations of Muslims converted into gardens (v) wasteland developed by Muslims with the *imam's* permission. Thus *ushri* land is the tithe land and the rate of this is 1/10th of the produce, provided the land is irrigated by rain or running water. For crops watered by artificial means, the rate is one half of one-tenth. In either case the tax is on gross produce.[8] The term *sulhi* was applied to lands outside India regarding which the earlier Muslims had reached some agreement with their owners.[9]

The term *kharaj* in its Aramaic form, precedes the birth of the Prophet.[10] It was originally used in the general sense of a tax, but later it came to be applied specifically to the land-revenue realized from lands conquered by the Islamic soldiers but left to their non-Islamic owners. Besides if a *zimmi* (protected citizen who pays *jiziyah*)[11] brought *ushri* land, it became *kharaji*. If the owner of *kharaji* land turned Muslim, his land remained *kharaji*. All the water carried in channels dug or controlled by the state was *kharaji*.[12]

Kharaj is of two kinds : *kharaj-i-wazifah* (fixed *kharaj*) and *kharaj-i-muqasamah* (proportional *kharaj*). *Kharaj-i-*

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[8] Aghnides 282-95.

[9] Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi* (New Delhi : Oriental Reprint, 1971) 101-102.

[10] For use of the term *kharaj* by Persians in pre-Prophet days, see A.J. Arberry, *The Legacy of Persia* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1953) 65-66.

[11] The *jiziyah*, or poll tax, is an Arabicised form of the Persian word *Gezit*. According to the *Hanifites*, it is to be taken from the *zimmis* in view of the assistance which they would be liable to give if they had not persisted in their unbelief; because living as they do in a Muslim state, they must be ready to defend it. See Aghnides 399; also K.A. Nizami 326-331.

[12] Qureshi 103.

wazifah refers to a demand in money and kind per unit area fixed according to the species of the crops grown. The rates are those applied by the Caliph Omar to the lands of Sawad in Iraq and cannot be increased.[13] In cases where no precedent is available, the *kharaj* is assessed on the tax bearing capacity of the lands. According to Al Mawardi, the factors which determine the tax bearing capacity of the land are : the quality of land, the kind of crop grown and the method of irrigation.[14] In the case of payments in cash the distance of cultivated tract from cities and markets is also taken into consideration. For fixing the area there is the system of measurement by *jarib*.[15] *Kharaj-i-muqasamah* is levied in proportion to the produce of the land. It is the *kharaj* which the ruler levies from year to year. The state's share ranges from a tenth to a half.[16]

According to Moreland, *ushri* land was 'tithe-land' and *kharaji* land was 'tribute-land'. Tithe land was primarily the home country in Arabia, and conquered territory was included in it only when the conqueror dispossessed the inhabitants, and distributed the land among his Islamic followers. The conquered lands in India were generally treated as *kharaji*, for it was physically impossible to dispossess the Hindu owners and cultivators and to convert their lands to *ushri*.[17] The non-Muslim

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[13] Aghnides 379.

[14] Al-Mawardi as cited by Aghnides 381.

[15] On every *jarib* of land which was fit for cultivation caliph Omar fixed one standard *dirham*; on every *jarib* of land which was more fertile he fixed 5 *dirhams* and on every *jarib* of garden land he fixed 10 *dirhams*.

[16] Abdul Hamid Muharrir Ghaznavi, "*Dastur-ul Albab fi Ilm-il Hisab*", partial Eng. trans. of a chapter S.A. Rashid, *Medieval India Quarterly* Vol. I No.3-4 : 59-99.

[17] There are references to *ushri* lands in the reign of Firuz Tughluq but these are exceptions.

subject of a Muslim state had to pay a personal tax (*jiziyah*) as also a 'tribute' (*kharaj*) for the land cultivated by him. The *kharaj* was originally intended to be spent for the benefit of the Muslims in general; but with the emergence of independent Islamic States it came to be regarded as a part of the income of the ruler to be spent for the general purposes of his government. Thus, "in India at any rate, the word *kharaj* can safely be translated as land-revenue or more shortly revenue".[18]

The precise share of land revenue was not laid down by Islamic law, but the underlying idea was that the profits of cultivation should be enjoyed by Muslims, and the only limit recognized by Abu Yusuf,[19] was the danger of checking production by over-assessment. The actual claim was decided by the ruler in accordance with local conditions, but he was free to demand the full economic rent, or Producer's Surplus, whatever it might be, provided always that such a demand did not cause the peasants to abscond, or reduce the area of their cultivation. The method of assessment also was left to be decided by the ruler and Abu Yusuf mentions the method of sharing and measurement.[20] Al Mawardi enumerates three methods of assessing *al-kharaj*:

1. *Al-Kharaj* was assessed on the basis of the total area of the village irrespective of the actual area cultivated.

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[18] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 14-15.

[19] Abu Yusuf was the Chief *Qazi* of Baghdad in the eighth century during the caliphate of Harun-ul-Rashid.

[20] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 15. Measurement meant that the land was measured, and a charge, partly cash and partly kind, was made on each unit of area. In sharing, a share of the produce was determined or estimated and valued at current prices.

2. The total cultivated area alone was made the basis of assessment.
3. The total yield was divided, the state getting its share.[21]

Under the early *Abassids* the collection of taxes was left in the hands of contractors in return for a fixed sum of money. This naturally led to extortions of various kinds. This buying and selling of tax-farms is severely condemned by Abu Yusuf. This system which was known as *at-taqbil*, had led to unauthorised exactions from the subjects by the contractor (*al-muqabbil*). Abu Yusuf permits *at-taqbil* if the people of a village propose that some trustworthy man from among them should be allowed to collect and pay the taxes into the treasury on behalf of all of them.[22]

Assignments of land revenue to charitable and religious institutions, was an integral part of Islamic law. Assignments were made to officials also. Minhaj refers to the assignment of the fief of Kuhram to Qutbuddin Aibak by Mohammad Ghuri in 1191.[23] The chief of Ghur also paid tribute to the ruler of Ghazni before he attained sovereignty and would sometimes even manifest a refractory spirit and withhold the amount of tribute.[24]

The founders of the Sultanate of Delhi had practically no experience in financial matters but for guidance they had the

[21] S.A.Q. Husaini, *Arab Administration* (1949; Delhi : IAD, 1976) 196.
[22] Husaini 197.
[23] Maulana Minhaj-ud-din Abu-Umar-i-Usman, *Tabakat-i-Nasiri*, Eng. trans. H.G. Raverty, Vol. I(1897; New Delhi : Book, 1970) 469, 515.
[24] Siraj 320.

Islamic theory of finance and the system of the Ghaznavides whom they supplanted. Under the Ghaznavides, we get the following information about the land revenue system : As far as the central government at Ghazni was concerned, the business was managed upon a regular system. The central financial department was presided over by the *wazir*. He appointed the *amils* for different provinces who collected the state revenue.[25] The Central Revenue Department looked after the financial affairs of the kingdom (*shagal*, *ishraf*) and maintained a regular account of records of the *Mal-i Kharaj* (revenue) sent to it from different provinces. The revenue was paid both in cash and kind and included articles of gold and silver, entire pieces of cloth, valuable horses and camels and everything most suitable for royal pomp and splendour.[26]

The Indian territories conquered by the early Ghaznavide princes were formed into a separate province, which was administered by two officials – *Sipah Salar* (Governor) and *Qazi*. The office of the governor was a very important and honourable one for which a trained and experienced general was required. It was the *Qazi's* business to carry on civil affairs and collect the revenue while the general made war, took tribute and chastised the refractory Hindus. The *Qazi* was assisted by a revenue-collector (*Amil*) and an accountant general (*Mushrif*).

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[25] K.A. Nizami, *Religion and Politics* 29. The institutions of the Ghaznavides seem to have been greatly influenced by the traditions of Baghdad and Bukhara.

[26] Abul Fazl Baihaqi, *Tarikh us Subuktigin*, Eng. trans. Elliot and Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. II (Aligarh : Cosmopolitan, 1952) 69-70.

When Ahmad Nialtigin was appointed the governor of Hindustan, the *Wazir* of Masud instructed him not to meddle with financial affairs but to leave them to the *Qazi*.[27] When Masud appointed his own son Majdud as the governor of Hindustan, he put a *Dabir* (secretary) and a *Mustaufi* (accountant and treasurer) at his disposal.[28] In the time of famines the state tried to help the people. The governor was instructed to protect the peasants and people of lower ranks from being bitten by the canine teeth of calamities, and from being trampled upon by disasters.[29] The system prevailing in the time of the Ghaznavides was probably followed by the Ghurids.

After the conquest of India Muizzudin Ghuri appointed governors at different places who probably exercised both civil and military powers. Minhaj refers to the assignment of the fief of Kuhram to Aibak by Muhammad Ghuri in 1191.[30] Just as, Muhammad Ghuri had entrusted the charge of different territories to his officials, the so-called Slave Sultans distributed tracts of land among their own followers and officials. Territorial units assigned in this way were termed *iqtas* and the person entrusted with the charge of an *iqta* was designated *muqti* or *wali*.

According to the Islamic law, a *muqti* was not considered the owner of the *iqta* but was simply allowed, within

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[27] Baihaqi 115-117.
[28] Baihaqi 133.
[29] Hasan Nizami, *Taj ul Maasir*, Eng. trans. Bhagwat Saroop (Delhi : Saud Ahmad Dehlavi, 1998) 336.
[30] Siraj 469, 515.

defined limits, the ownership of the usufruct.[31] Thus, the *iqta* was a transferable revenue assignment (on *kharaji* lands) allotted to members of the ruling class. The *muqtis* collected *kharaj* and other taxes from the *iqta*, maintained themselves and their troops out of them, and sent the surpluses to the state treasury. The *iqta* system thus assured the collection of revenue in the newly conquered areas.

Another class of land was the crown land or *khalisa* from which the *kharaj* and other taxes were collected directly by the state officials for the Sultan's own treasury. However, the position of the *muqtis* was precarious. They were more like military commanders, depending on extortion of tribute from their *iqtas* rather than actual collection. We may therefore infer that the potentates surviving from the older regime were allowed to continue collecting the revenues from the peasants, and some of the revenue so collected, went as a tribute to the Sultan's assignees.[32] However in 'rebellious territories' (*mawasat*) even such arrangements were not possible. Plunder of cattle and slaves from unpacified areas was thus indulged.[33]

There is no record of any significant changes in the agrarian system of the Delhi Sultanate prior to the radical reforms of Alauddin Khalji in c. 1300. Moreland[34] raises the question whether any inference can be drawn from the silence of

[31] R.P. Tripathi, *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration* (1936; Allahabad : Central Book Depot, 1992) 244.
[32] These local potentates were called *rais*, *ranas*, *rautas*.
[33] Siraj 760, 806, 816, 818, 821, 825, 828, 853.
[34] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 26.

the chroniclers regarding the functioning of the agrarian system in the thirteenth century. Minhaj-us-Siraj, who was the Chief *Qazi* of Delhi in the middle of the thirteenth century, shows scant interest in agrarian topics. From Siraj's biographies of twenty-five eminent *Shamsi* nobles,[35] we do get an idea of how the *iqta* system worked under the early Turkish Sultans; but we are told nothing of the methods by which the revenue was assessed and collected.

Ziauddin Barani, who claims to have taken up the narrative from where Minhaj us Siraj had left off duly records the extensive land revenue reforms of Alauddin Khalji but mentions no such changes introduced during the reign of Balban. We may infer from Barani's silence that there was nothing significant to record. However, it is quite possible that in the western Punjab, which had seen two centuries of Ghaznavide rule, the Islamic taxation system was already in operation.[36] By the end of the thirteenth century, it might have been imposed in the neighbourhood of Delhi. But this process is left entirely unrecorded. What is recorded is the seemingly sudden imposition of a uniform taxation system over a very large part of northern India by Sultan Alauddin Khalji (1296-1316).

The credit of taking definite steps to organize land revenue goes to Sultan Alauddin Khalji. He was the first sovereign of the Turkish line to take a keen interest in revenue

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[35] Minhaj-us-Siraj has given useful biographies of 25 eminent *Shamsi* nobles. See Siraj 722-865.

[36] Sultan Mahmud (998-1030) repeatedly led his conquering forces into the Punjab and annexed it after the fall of the Hindushahi dynasty.

reforms. His predecessors from Qutbuddin Aibak to Jalaluddin Khalji either did not get the time or did not possess the initiative to delve into this complicated branch of administration.[37] The changes made by Alauddin in the agrarian system "did not arise from any economic, still less from any philanthropic motive, but were inspired solely by political and military considerations".[38] The internal rebellions and the need to create a large army to meet the threat of recurrent Mongol invasions led him to introduce reforms both in the military and revenue departments.

Alauddin's measures were intended to serve three purposes : (i) to provide means of preventing rebellions which had successfully troubled Sultan Alauddin since his accession;[39] (ii) to break the power of the local *khots*, *muqaddams* and *chaudharis*, i.e. the intermediaries, and thus bridging the bridging the gap between the peasantry and the state; (iii) to add to the income of the state by enhancement of land revenue.

Apart from small *iqtas* there were various kinds of grants – *milk* (proprietary rights), *inam* (gifts), *idrarat* (pension), *waqf* (endowment), *mafruz* – which involved the alienation of a considerable portion of the land revenue. The rulers had been granting lands in *waqf* and *inam* to gain favour or support of a certain section of the Muslim community.[40] These grants were almost exclusively, held by the Muslims. At his accession

[37] Kishori Saran Lal, *History of the Khaljis A.D.1290-1320* (Bombay : Asia, 1967)177.
[38] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 31.
[39] An account of these rebellions is given in Ziauddin Barani, *Tarikh-i Firozshahi*, Eng. trans. Elliot and Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. III (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, n.d.) 175-179.
[40] U.N. Day, *Some Aspects of Medieval Indian History* (New Delhi : Kumar, 1971) 92.

Alauddin himself purchased the support of the nobility and the people of Delhi by lavish distribution of treasures and conferring on them *iqtas*, *inams* and offices.[41] The rebellions at the very beginning of his reign, however led him to search for causes, and he was told by his confidential advisers that one of the causes was the accumulation of money in the hands of the people. In the words of Barani, he was told that, "if men had no money, they would attend to their own business, and would never think of riots and revolts".[42]

So the first step that Alauddin took was to confiscate land held mostly by Muslim grantees and religious men. Barani informs us that Sultan Alauddin ordered that, "wherever there was a village held by proprietary right (*milk*), in free gift (*inam*) or as a religious endowment (*wakf*), it should by one stroke of the pen be brought back under the exchequer". The effect of this measure was that "excepting *maliks* and *amirs*, officials, *Multanis*, and bankers, no one possessed even a trifle in cash".[43] It is difficult to believe that all such land was confiscated by the State. It has been opined that "more probably he asserted the right of the State to deal with all classes of land, cancelled all such grants of which he did not approve and bestowed others on his own terms".[44]

Sultan Alauddin decreed that three basic taxes were to be levied on the peasantry; viz. *kharaj*, or tax on cultivation,

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[41] P. Saran, *Studies in Medieval Indian History* (Delhi : Ranjit, 1952) 146.
[42] Barani, *Tarikh* 178.
[43] Barani, *Tarikh* 179.
[44] Tripathi 256.

charai, a tax on milch cattle and *ghari*, a tax on houses. For this purpose two regulations (*zabitas*) were issued. The first one related to the collection of *kharaj*. To meet the growing demands of the exchequer Alauddin raised the scale of taxation to the highest point allowed by the Islamic law.[45] He charged fifty percent of the gross produce of the land. Barani says :

> All cultivation, whether on a small or large scale, was to be carried on by measurement at a certain rate for every *biswa*. Half (of the produce) was to be paid without any diminution, and this rule was to apply to *khutas* and *balahars*, without the slightest distinction. The *khuts* were to be deprived of all their peculiar privileges.[46]

From this regulation it appears that a uniform system of measurement was introduced for determining land revenue and *biswa* was declared to be the standard unit of measurement. Alauddin appears to be the first Islamic ruler of India who laid emphasis on the system of measurement. Measurement of land as an important basis for assessment was recognized by the Islamic law and was also known in India prior to the coming of the Turks.[47]

Under Alauddin, the land cultivated under each crop was measured, then the yield was estimated per unit of area (*biswa*). By multiplying the total area under that particular crop by the yield estimate of a *biswa*, the total yield or produce of each crop was worked out. This method of computing yields was to be applied to each holding. Half of the computed yield was to

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[45] Aghnides 378.

[46] Barani, *Tarikh* 182.

[47] See U.N. Ghoshal, *The Agrarian System of Ancient India* (Calcutta : Calcutta University, 1930) 26, 27.

be exacted from each holding as the State share.[48] This rule of measurement and the *biswa*-yield was called "*hukm-i masahat wa wafa-i biswa*".In this phrase the word *masahat* has been used as a technical term indicating the system of measurement. According to Moreland, it is an early synonym for *jarib* or *paimaish*, which term became more common during the Mughal rule.[49] The word '*wafa*' had acquired the technical meaning of 'yield of crops' and according to Moreland, "*biswa*-yield would then indicate the standard outturn per unit of area, which was a necessary datum for the method of measurement".[50] The whole phrase, used by Barani, indicates the system of measurement for assessment of revenue in which the produce of a *biswa* was taken as a unit for calculating the total revenue.

As to the system of payment, *kharaj* was collected both in cash and kind. Barani says that the Sultan ordered the revenue collectors to collect the tribute so vigorously that the peasants were forced to sell their corn in the fields at a low price.[51] The peasant would not be forced to sell the crop if the demand was in kind. However, the statement that Alauddin required peasants to pay tax in kind and not cash occurs elsewhere in Barani. Barani informs us that the Sultan gave orders that in the *khalisa* villages of the *Doab*, revenue should be

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[48] Tapan Ray Chaudhary and Irfan Habib, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of India 1200-1750*, Vol. I (Hyderabad : Orient, 1984) 61.

[49] For the term '*jarib*' see Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi : Oxford UP, 2000) 239-40, 259-60.

[50] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 226.

[51] Barani, *Tarikh* 194.

collected in kind, whereas in the New City (*shahr-i-nau*)[52] and its adjoining territories at least half of the revenue should be collected in kind. Such statements from Barani make it hard to determine whether collection of land revenue was done uniformly in cash or uniformly in kind. It can be assumed that tax was normally collected in cash; only as a special measure Alauddin encouraged collection in kind in some of the *khalisa* areas so as to fill the royal granaries with grain to serve as reserve stocks against scarcities.[53]

A second regulation was promulgated for the collection of *charai* (grazing tax) and *ghari* (house tax). *Charai* was a grazing tax on all milch cattle from a cow to a she-goat, which was to be realized only when the cattle were wet and not when they went dry. *Ghari* was a house tax on every inhabited house.[54] Barani says that, "a tax for pasturage, at a fixed rate, was to be levied, and was to be demanded for every inhabited house, so that no animal, however wretched, could escape the tax".[55] The rules for the payment of tribute were to apply equally to all, rich or poor, high or low. Barani mentions neither any limitations of nor any exemptions from *charai* i.e. the tax on milch cattle.

Ferishta however states that holdings upto two pairs of oxen, a pair of buffaloes, two cows and ten goats were exempt

[52] The New City was the new town founded by Alauddin near Jhain (Chhain). See S.H. Hodivala, *Studies in Indo Muslim History* (Bombay : Popular, 1939) 279.
[53] Barani, *Tarikh* 193.
[54] Saran 155-56; Hodivala 278.
[55] Barani, *Tarikh* 182.

from the levy.[56] But since neither Ferishta's source of information is known, nor does Barani indicate any exemptions, Ferishta's figures cannot be accepted as entirely reliable. The rate and procedure of the collection of *ghari* is unfortunately not known.

To organize and implement the new revenue system and to enforce the regulations, Sharaf Qaini (or Qai) the *naib wazir* of the empire made strenuous efforts. The extent of country over which these regulations operated is not entirely clear. Moreland has summarized the long list of provinces given by Barani :

> Taking the list as it stands, we learn that the regulations were applied by degrees to Delhi, the River Country and the rest of the *Doab*. To the East, Rohilkhand was included, but not Awadh or Bihar; to the South, portions of Malwa and Rajputana were included, but not Gujarat; while on the West, all the Punjab provinces are indicated with the exception of Multan.[57]

It can be inferred that the new taxation system was imposed over a fairly large region in northern India.

Alauddin's regulations brought the State into direct relation with the cultivator. This step required the employment of an enormous staff for revenue collection (*mutaliba wa musadara*), consisting of *mushrifs*,[58] *muhassils*[59] (demanders of

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[56] Muhammad Qasim Ferishta, *Tarikh-i-Ferishta*, Eng.trans. J. Briggs, *History of the rise of the Mahomedan Power in India*, Vol. I (Calcutta : Cambray & Co.,1966) 197.

[57] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 34.

[58] *Mushrif* is derived from *'ishraf'* meaning 'to see' and was an officer concerned mostly with the collection of taxes. For details of duties of *mushrif*, see Ghaznavi, trans. Abdur Rashid 85-86.

[59] Etymologically a collector. According to Moreland, he was an official in the 14th century with unspecified functions, appointed by the King in the territory of a Chief.

tribute), *amils*[60] (revenue collectors), *gumashtas*[61] (agents), *mutasarrifs*[62] (accountants or auditors), *uhdadaran-i dafatir* (persons in charge of offices) and *nawisandas* (writers or clerks). These officers carried out the work of assessment as well as collection, and after collection deposited the amount with the central treasury. The power and wealth of the local intermediaries like *khots* (farmers of revenue), *muqaddams* (village headmen) and *chaudharis* (revenue collectors) were obliterated and they were relieved of their work of revenue collection. Their holdings were now subjected to assessment for the realization of *kharaj*, *charai* and *ghari* and they could no longer shift the burden of their own share of the revenue to the cultivators.[63]

Steps were taken to remove the mal-administration in the revenue department. "One of the standing evils in the revenue collection consisted in defective realization which usually left large balances to be accounted for." Unrealized balances were probably inevitable because "the revenue system was yet in the making and the machinery for assessment and collection was yet undeveloped".[64] A new department known as *Diwan-i-Mustakhraj* was created for the purpose of inquiring into the arrears lying in the name of collectors, and of realizing them. The *Amils* and *Karkuns* were punished if they failed to realize

[60] In the 13th-15th century denoted an executive official in general. Later it had the specialized meaning of collector of revenue in *khalisa* lands.
[61] An assistant or subordinate. Often applied to subordinates employed by the *amil*.
[62] Revenue collector. According to Qureshi the posts of *amil* and *mutasarrif* were similar.
[63] Day 99.
[64] Tripathi 262.

the balances in full. The primary record used for this purpose was the register (*bahi*) of the *patwari* (village accountant). Equally drastic measures were taken to stop corruption among the lower officials of the revenue department. Firstly, the Sultan increased their salaries so that they could live with comfort and respectability, but this did not check their venality.[65] Alauddin, then, ruthlessly punished all those found guilty of corruption. Barani tells us that the *naib wazir* discovered from the registers of the *patwaris* every *jital* that was due from the collectors and other revenue officers and exacted it by blows of the stick, racks, bonds and chains.[66] As a result of these measures writes Barani :

> There was no chance of a single *tanka* being taken dishonestly, or as bribery, from any Hindu or *Musulman*. The revenue collectors and officers were so coerced and checked that for five hundred or a thousand *tankas* they were imprisoned and kept in chains for years. Men looked upon revenue officers as something worse than fever. Clerkship was a great crime, and no man would give his daughter to a clerk. Death was deemed preferable to revenue employment. Oft times fiscal officers fell into prison, and had to endure blows and stripes.[67]

Through these measures, the evils in the revenue collection were purged, corruption and bribery were checked and the exchequer enriched.

Alauddin Khalji's agrarian measures struck hard at the privileged sections in the villages i.e. the *khots*, *muqaddams* and *chaudharis*, and Barani describes their humiliation with much satisfaction. Due to his excessive demands, however, the

[65] Lal, *History of the Khaljis* 187.
[66] Barani, *Tarikh* 183.
[67] Barani, *Tarikh* 183.

peasantry was in no way benefitted. A demand of half the produce besides other taxes like *jiziyah*, house-tax and grazing-tax cannot have left the ordinary peasant with any substantial surplus.[68]

Alauddin's system was designed to prevent 'the burden of the strong falling upon the weak' but a government levying such a heavy and regressive tax could hardly have done so. His government protected the 'weak' from the 'strong' in so far as it tried to restrict further exploitation of the peasantry by the rural upper strata to safeguard its own share of the producer's surplus.[69]

During the reign of Alauddin Khalji's successor, Qutbuddin Mubarak Khalji (1317-20), most of the regulations of Alauddin fell into disuse. The work of the revenue ministry fell into disorder. Even the *kharaj* did not remain at the level Alauddin had decreed, although the extent of the reduction is uncertain. Barani merely asserts that the revenue demand was reduced and severe methods of revenue realization were abolished.[70] The result was that the prices of grain and other necessities of life rose sharply. Bribery and corruption were once again rampant. With the reduction in the rates of *kharaj*, the condition of the Hindu middlemen i.e. *khots* and *muqaddams* improved considerably and they were once again able to wear

[68] Lal, *History of the Khaljis* 188-89.
[69] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 62.
[70] Barani, *Tarikh* 212-13. Barani writes that the penalties, extortion, beating, chains, fetters and blows were set aside in revenue matters.

fine clothes, ride horses.[71]

Sultan Ghiyasuddin Tughluq (1320-25) had acquired a difficult legacy and a depleted treasury from Khusrau Khan,[72] so he set himself to the task of rehabilitating the depleted exchequer and organizing the finances of the empire. Ghiyasuddin followed the policy of moderation (*tariqa-i itidal wa rasm-i miyana ravi*) in all administrative affairs. Barani has given an account of the agrarian policy followed by the Sultan.

Barani reports that Sultan Ghiyasuddin ordered that the land revenues of the country should be settled upon just principles with reference to the produce (*hukm-i hasil*).[73] Thus he rescinded Alauddin's rule of measurement (*hukm-i masahat*) and substituted it for crop sharing (*hukm-i hasil*). This method ensured to the producer the benefit accruing from improved cultivation, and also made allowances for a complete or partial failure of crops.[74]

Ghiyasuddin denounced the farming system and did not appoint revenue-farmers as provincial governors. The governors were usually recruited from the nobility. Instructions were given to the Revenue Ministry not to make an increment over one-tenth or one-eleventh on the annual estimate of income of an *iqta* or *wilayat* by surmises or on the reports of spies or of those interested in the enhancement of revenue.[75] Wolseley

[71] Lal, *History of the Khaljis* 290.
[72] He was the last of the Khalji Sultans.
[73] Barani, *Tarikh* 230.
[74] Mohammad Habib and K.A. Nizami, *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. V (New Delhi : PPH, 1970) 466-67.
[75] Tripathi 271.

Haig's interpretation of this sentence that the State demand was reduced to one-tenth or one-eleventh of the produce, hardly demands serious consideration.[76] Such drastic reduction would have been impractical for a ruler who had to maintain a large army and keep the military leaders satisfied. Ghiyasuddin did not usher a millenium since no ruler could do that.

Ghiyasuddin was not oblivious of the necessity of enhancing the revenue but unlike Alauddin he favoured gradual increase. He said that, "efforts should be made that cultivation should increase every year and the revenue be enhanced very gradually".[77] He was aware that countries were ruined by excessive taxation and the exorbitant demand of kings. The oppressive methods adopted by Alauddin Khalji were given up. Ghiyasuddin was not harsh upon the *khots* and *muqaddams* like Alauddin Khalji. He ordered the restoration of their perquisites and granted them exemptions from the payment of *kharaj* and *charai* provided that they did not impose a separate assessment on the peasants, apart from the king's revenue. They were strictly prohibited from making excessive demands on the peasants but were given discretionary powers to force refractory cultivators to till the soil.[78] Ghiyasuddin did not believe in levelling down the village headmen to the rank of the ordinary peasant since they provided useful services in the collection of

[76] Wolseley Haig, *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. III (New Delhi : S. Chand, 1971) 128. See also Qureshi 114-15.
[77] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 227.
[78] Agha Mahdi Husain, *Tughluq Dynasty* (New Delhi : S. Chand, 1976) 62.

the government demand. They were, however, prevented from becoming mischievous or defiant.[79]

The position of the *muqtis* or *walis* was enhanced by disallowing the practice of severe interrogation during *mutaliba*[80]. They were allowed to take the ordinary perquisites of post described as "a half-tenth or half-eleventh and the one-tenth or one-fifteenth of the revenue" but at the same time, a correspondingly high standard of conduct was expected from them. Similarly, if the subordinate officers i.e. agents and deputies (*karkunan*[81] *wa mutsarrifan*) appropriated a half or one percent in addition to their salaries, they were not to be disgraced, tortured or imprisoned to recover that small amount. But if they were guilty of appropriating considerable sums, stern action was to be taken against them.[82] Ghiyasuddin's policy of agrarian taxation was based on liberal principles but his reign was too short to establish a new tradition.

Muhammad Tughluq (1325-51) began his reign well. The people expected a lot from him as a monarch for he was "not less famous for his gallantry in the field than for those accomplishments, which render a man the ornament of private society".[83] For his reign we have no formal statement of agrarian policy, and no direct indication of the king's ideals, but we have

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[79] Habib and Nizami 468.
[80] *Mutaliba* meant the process of demanding or recovery of revenue receipts.
[81] From the 16th century the word *karkun* usually means clerk,' writer. According to Moreland, the same meaning is appropriate in some 13th-14th century passages, but they are too few to show with certainty whether the word had become specialised by that period. *See also* Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System 271-72.*
[82] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 229.
[83] Ferishta, Vol. I 236.

a series of episodes which enable us to form a picture of the land revenue system under Muhammad Tughluq. These were : (i) Attempt at centralization of provincial administration with the idea of introducing uniform taxation, (ii) enhancement of agrarian taxation in the *Doab*, (iii) the Sultan's attempt at rehabilitating agriculture.

Muhammad bin Tughluq inherited a vast empire and he personally made substantial contribution towards its consolidation. The vast extent of the Tughluq empire, during his reign is emphasized by the statements of Shihabuddin al-Umari, the author of *Masalik-ul-Absar*.[84] He writes :

> This empire is extremely extensive. Its length and breadth are so much that three years are required for covering it by ordinary journey. Its latitude lies between Somnath and Sarandib (Ceylon) upto Ghazna and its longitude from the port opposite to Aden to the wall of Alexander (the great Chinese Wall) where the Indian Ocean meets the Pacific Ocean. This vast region is full of closely situated big cities, towns and villages with the representatives of the Sultan, the ruling princes, flourishing population, *bazars* and good cultivation.[85]

Shihabuddin Umari further says :

> There are twenty three provinces in the Empire of the Sultan : Delhi, Deogir, Multan, Kuhram, Samana, Sevistan (Lower Sind), Uchh (Upper Sind), Hansi, Sarsuti (Haryana), Kalanaur (Punjab and Himachal Pradesh), Lahore, Badaon, Aud (Awadh), Qanauj, Kara, Bihar, Lakhnauti (Bengal), Malwa, Gujarat, Jajnagar (Orissa), Telangana (Eastern Andhra Pradesh), Maabar (Karnalika), Dursamandr (Tamil Nadu). The provinces are composed of sub-divisions and populous

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[84] It is an important work compiled by the leading Arab scholar Shihabuddin al-Umari in 1344 A.D. His sources of information were reliable, he either drew on early standard works or collected information from the travellers and scholars who had visited different countries.

[85] Shihabuddin al-Umari, *Masalik-ul-Absar*. Eng. trans. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources of Information on the Life and Conditions of the Sultanate of Delhi* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1992) 111.

villages.... The province of Qanauj comprises one hundred and twenty lakh villages – every lakh being one hundred thousands – so that there are one crore and twenty lakh villages.[86]

Umari's description testifies the vast extent of the empire under Muhammad Tughluq. The Sultan had a clear concept about the political and administrative unity of the country and he stood for the extension of direct administrative control of the central government over all parts of India.

Thus one of the Sultan's earliest measures was an attempt to assimilate the administration of the outlying provinces to that of Delhi and the River Country, which were directly under the Revenue Ministry.[87] A uniform system of taxation was introduced in the territories of the empire. Detailed accounts of income and expenditure were submitted from the most distant provinces to the central government, which enabled it to exercise vigilance and control. The revenues and even the arrears accumulated for many years were realized strictly from the *naibs*, *walis* and *mutsarrafs*.[88] Ibn Battuta informs us that the *diwan-ul-mustakhraj* was the department for the realization of the arrears of the revenue officials, which used to be extorted from them by means of "bastinado and tortures".[89]

During the later Khalji and the Tughluq period a policy of annexation in the Deccan, was adopted by the Delhi Sultans. In the Deccan and other distant provinces, new and

[86] Umari 112-13.
[87] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 46.
[88] Tripathi 274.
[89] Ibn Battuta, *Rehla*, Eng. trans. Mahdi Husain (Baroda : Oriental Institute, 1953) 87.

capable officers – *walis*, *naibs* and *amils* were appointed by Muhammad Tughluq. Barani informs us that Malik Kabul, the *naib wazir* was appointed to be ruler over Tilang. Similarly, "the Mahratta country was entrusted to Katlagh Khan".[90] He also writes that, "when the Sultan arrived at Deogir he made heavy demands upon the *Musulman* chiefs and the collectors of the Mahratta country. Heavy *abwabs* were also imposed on the country, and persons were specially appointed to levy them".[91]

However, the experiment of centralization did not survive for long. The autocratic nature of the Sultan made the people rebellious. Barani writes :

> The tribute of most of the countries and districts was lost, and many of the soldiers and servants were scattered and left in distant lands. Gujarat and Deogir were the only (distant) possessions that remained. In the old territories, dependent on Delhi, the capital, disaffection and rebellion sprung up.[92]

The sequel of this episode is not formally recorded but Moreland, on the basis of two instances, has rightly assumed that "the speculative Farmer supervened in the provinces".[93] We have here, the example of Nusrat Khan, who took the contract of the *iqta* of Bidar and the surrounding territories and in the course of three years misappropriated about a crore of *tankas* from the revenue. He rebelled but was subsequently captured and imprisoned.[94]

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[90] Barani, *Tarikh* 243-44.
[91] Barani, *Tarikh* 243.
[92] Barani, *Tarikh* 237.
[93] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 46.
[94] Agha Mahdi Husain, *The Rise and Fall of Muhammad Bin Tughluq* (Delhi : IAD, 1972) 165-66.

Another novel development in the reign of Muhammad Tughluq was the enhancement of agrarian taxation in the *Doab* with a view to augment his resources. The *Doab* was the region lying between the rivers Ganga and the Yamuna. According to Moreland, the region referred to as *Doab* by the chroniclers lay between the Ganga and the Yamuna, and it extended up to the submontane forest in the North but did not reach much further than Aligarh in the South. During the thirteenth century, this region was divided into three provinces, Meerut, Baran (Bulandshahr) and Koil (Aligarh). It was brought directly under the Revenue Ministry on the same footing as the Delhi country by Alauddin Khalji.[95] This region seems to have been chosen for increase in taxation for several reasons. It was prosperous and, therefore, capable of paying more than the less productive regions. It was directly controlled by the *wizarat*, and its revenue was reserved mainly for the Central treasury. It was inhabited by a refractory population suspected of collusion with the Mongol invaders.[96] The chief motive seems to have been to obtain revenue in order to be able to strengthen his army and to improve his administrative machinery.

Barani gives the first place to this scheme of taxation among the causes of decline of Muhammad's empire; and "coming as it did last in the order of the royal innovations and projects, he puts it first in view of its gravity and significance".[97]

[95] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 23.
[96] Qureshi 115.
[97] Mahdi Husain, *Rise and Fall* 148.

Barani states that "the first project which the Sultan formed, and which operated to the ruin of the country and the decay of the people, was that he thought he ought to get ten or five percent more tribute from the lands in the *Doab*".[98] The enhancement is described as *yaki ba dah wa yaki ba bist*. Moreland rightly states that the phrase is "rhetorical not arithmetical"[99] and should not be taken to mean increase from ten to twenty times. Being rhetorical, the phrase is suggestive of the impression that a dramatic increase took place in the rate of land revenue in the *Doab*.

Two chroniclers, Barani and Yahya bin Sihrindi suggest different ways in which the enhancement in land revenue was brought about. Barani says that, "to accomplish this he invented some oppressive *abwabs* (cesses)".[100] Yahya, on the other hand says that the three major taxes were more vigorously assessed and collected, the cattle being branded and the houses counted. Worse, while assessing the land revenue, instead of actual yield, a standard yield was applied to the area measured. For commuting the state's share into cash, instead of the actual prices, the officially assumed prices were used. This would have inflated the tax heavily since the officially assumed yields and prices were much higher than the actual ones.[101]

It has been argued that the Sultan followed Alauddin's

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[98] Barani, *Tarikh* 238.
[99] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 48.
[100] Barani, *Tarikh* 238.
[101] See *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 63-64; also Mahdi Husain, *Tughluq Dynasty* 229.

policy and did not exceed the legal maximum which had been reached under him.[102] But however exaggerated and rhetorical Barani's language might be, it leads to the practically inescapable conclusion that there was a substantial increase in taxation although the exact nature and rate of increase cannot be ascertained. These measures led to the destruction of the peasantry and to an agrarian uprising which affected a large area near Delhi and the *Doab*. Barani writes that, "the cesses were collected so rigorously that the *raiyats* were impoverished and reduced to beggary. Those who were rich and had property became rebels; the lands were ruined and cultivation was entirely arrested".[103] Barani further says that when the peasants of distant regions heard of the ruin and destruction of the peasantry, and fearful that the same orders may be applied to them, they also rose in rebellion. Badaoni refers to the *Doab* episode in the following words :

> The tribute to be paid by the inhabitants of the *Doab*, which district comprises some of the chief towns of *Hindustan*, was increased from ten percent to twenty percent, besides which there was the numbering of the cattle, and the house-census, and other taxes over and above these, and in this way the more needy portion of the people left their property and cattle and attached themselves to the richer folk, while the wealthier subjects plotted rebellion and sedition and took to highway robbery, and pillaged the country in all directions.[104]

Undoubtedly, this was a massive peasant rebellion led by

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[102] Ishwari Prasad, *A History of the Qaraunah Turks in India* (Allahabad : Indian Press, 1936) 72.

[103] Barani, *Tarikh* 238.

[104] Al-Badaoni, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*, Eng. trans. and ed. George S.A. Ranking, Vol. I (Delhi : IAD, 1973 reprint) 316.

the upper strata of the agrarian society – the *khots* and *muqaddams*.

The distress of the people was aggravated by the severity practised by the officials in the realization of these cesses. The *shiqdars* and *faujdars* (revenue collectors and military commanders) were ordered to lay waste and plunder the country. In consequence, many of the *khots* and *muqaddams* were killed, or took refuge in forests. The Sultan's troops surrounded the jungles and killed everyone found there. Thus, the entire area from Kannauj to Dalmau was laid waste.[105]

"To make matters worse, a famine occurred at this time and there is nothing to show that the Sultan relaxed the severity of his demands."[106] The famine began in 1334-35 and continued to rage till 1341.[107] Barani attributes the causes of this famine to the decline of cultivation in the *Doab*, the ruin of its peasantry, the failure of grain to reach Delhi from other parts and lastly, the failure of rains.[108] Barani ascribes this calamity in its initial stages, at least, to the heavy land tax and introduces us to a new relationship between land revenue and agricultural production. Heavy taxation greatly affected agriculture; but conversely, a decline in agriculture caused a corresponding fall in land revenue.[109]

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[105] Barani,*Tarikh* 242; Habib and Nizami 525.
[106] Prasad, *Qaraunah Turks* 73.
[107] Battuta 84, 104-5. The date of the beginning of the famine is established by the fact that it began soon after Saiyyid Hasan declared himself independent in Ma'bar in 1334-35.
[108] Barani, *Tarikh* 238.
[109] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 65.

Somewhere around the year 1337, when Delhi was restored as the capital instead of Devgiri,[110] and the Sultan reached Delhi, he found a deadly famine raging. The country was desolate and in Barani's words "not a thousandth part of the population remained".[111] The Sultan tried to rehabilitate agriculture and restore cultivation. Ibn Battuta writes :

> When the famine was raging all over Hind and Sind and prices became exorbitant to such an extent that the price of a maund (*mann*) of wheat rose to six *dinars*, the Sultan ordered six months' provisions at the rate of a daily allowance of one and a half *ratl* of *maghrib* per head to be given to all the people of Delhi. He ordered this to be given to everyone great or small, free or slave.[112]

He further mentions that the Sultan ordered the sinking of wells outside the capital city and the cultivation of crops there. For this purpose, the people were provided with seeds as well as the requisite sum of money.[113] In order to promote cultivation, the Sultan advanced loans (*sondhar*) from the treasury to buy seed, bullocks etc. and provisions were made to dig wells for irrigation. However, the rains failed and nothing could be done.[114]

Due to the failure of rains, the famine grew worse and Muhammad was obliged to permit a large-scale emigration from the capital to the fertile Awadh region, and he himself set up a temporary residence on the Ganges. The place was called *Sargdwari* (Heaven's gate). The Sultan had to stay there for

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110 For details of the transfer of capital, see Habib and Nizami 506-515.
111 Barani, *Tarikh* 244.
112 Battuta 86-7.
113 Battuta 88.
114 Barani, *Tarikh* 244-45.

about two and a half years from the close of 1338 to the middle of 1341.[115]

Famine, it has been said, "seriously dislocated the revenue system of the Sultan".[116] After returning from *Sargdwari*, Muhammad took several steps to promote agriculture. The Sultan made regulations (*uslub* or *asalib*) for the improvement of agriculture; whatever came to his mind for this object was written down and called a regulation.[117] For the purpose of extending cultivation, a new agricultural department was established called the *Diwan-i-Amir-i-kohi* with a staff of about a hundred officials (*shiqdars*). The object of this department was to promote agriculture, and to increase the revenue.[118] Officers were appointed to take charge of territorial divisions with the approximate area of thirty *karohs* by thirty *karohs*. Every plot of land in each *karoh* was to be cultivated so that "one span of land would not remain uncultivated". The crops were to be changed i.e. wheat was to be sown instead of barley, sugarcane instead of wheat, and grapes and dates were to be planted instead of sugarcane.[119] The idea behind the experiment was sound but it failed in its practical working due to incompetent and dishonest officials.

About a hundred *shiqdars* were given various awards and loans to bring three lakhs of *bighas* of barren land (*zamin-i-*

[115] Battuta 87.
[116] Prasad, *Qaraunah Turks* 279; Badaoni, Vol. I 316.
[117] Mahdi Husain, *Rise and Fall* 175.
[118] Qureshi 128.
[119] This has been interpreted to imply rotation of crops. Haig 161.

akhal) under cultivation. But they squandered the money on their personal needs, and in three years they could not bring under cultivation a thousandth or even a hundredth part of the barren land assigned to them.[120] In the words of Barani :

> The officers entrusted with the distribution of loans from the public took care of themselves, and appropriated the money to their own wants and necessities. Much of the pasture land being unfit for cultivation remained uncultivated, and the superintendents were in dread of punishment. In the course of two years about seventy lacs of *tankas* had been issued from the treasury to the superintendents of the cultivation of waste-lands, and not one hundredth or a thousandth part of what was disbursed was reproduced in agriculture. If the Sultan had returned from his campaign against Thatta, not one of these superintendents and managers would have remained alive.[121]

From the above account we may infer that : Firstly, Muhammad Tughluq was the first Sultan to formulate a systematic policy for improvement in agriculture. The earlier Sultans laid stress mainly on maintenance and extension of cultivation but under Muhammad Tughluq the extension of area under cultivation was accompanied by improvement in the cropping pattern. The cultivators were being induced to shift over to valuable crops, such as cotton, canes, poppy and indigo.[122]

Secondly, the main device for promoting improvement in cropping pattern was the advancement of loans called *sondhar*.[123] These were advanced to peasants to enable them to

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[120] Prasad, *Qaraunah Turks* 283.
[121] Barani, *Tarikh* 250.
[122] These crops had a higher market value.
[123] The term *'taqavi'* was used for such loans under the later Sultanate and the Mughal administration. See Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System* 295-96.

extend cultivation and dig wells. This is the first recorded instance of the use of this device by an Indian ruler to promote cultivation. Such advances were a part of normal administration in earlier Islamic states also. Nizamul Mulk Tusi instructs the tax collectors that "If any peasant is in distress and in need of oxen or seed, let him be given a loan to ease his burden and keep him viable".[124]

At the time of Muhammad Tughluq's death the financial and revenue affairs of the empire were as unsatisfactory as the political. The failure of his ambitious projects, the depleted imperial exchequer, the threatened disintegration of the empire and frequent famines were some of the problems which his cousin and successor Firuz Tughluq (1351-1386) was called upon to face. His immediate task was to pacify the subjects and restore law and order. First of all, he wrote off all the loans advanced by way of *sondhar* for improvement in agriculture, amounting to two crore *tankas*.[125] Firuz Tughluq was advised by his Prime Minister Khan-i-Jahan that the recovery would put the people in great distress and poverty. The official loan registers were publicly destroyed and the "arrears were remitted in toto".[126]

Firuz Tughluq made efforts to reform the taxation system and to bring it in line with the *Shariat* Law. A large

[124] Nizam ul Mulk Tusi, *Siyasatnama*, Eng. trans. Hubert Darke, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings* (London : Routledge, 1978) 23.
[125] Shams-i-Siraj Afif, *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, Eng. trans. R.C. Jauhri, *Medieval India in Transition – Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi A First Hand Account* (New Delhi : Sundeep, 2001) 71.
[126] Afif, trans. Jauhri 72.

number of extra *shariat* taxes had been levied in earlier regimes. Firuz Shah considered their realization unlawful. He directed that the income of the state should be from the *shariat* taxes namely *kharaj* on taxable lands, *ushr*, *zakat*, *jiziyah* imposed on the Hindus, *tarkat* and *khums* from spoils of war and the produce of mines. He enjoined that "Any tax not sanctioned by the *Quran* is under no circumstances to be added to the exchequer (collected by the state)".[127] Firuz Shah abolished as many as twenty-four taxes including the *ghari* and *charai*. It is likely that the process of abolition of these cesses began in the early years of the reign and was completed in 1375-76.[128] Thus the Sultan sought to give some fiscal concessions to his subjects.

After making these concessions, the Sultan decreed that a fresh estimate of the prospective income of the kingdom be made. In the words of Afif :

> Firuz Shah directed the commencement of a land revenue settlement and appointed *Khwaja* Hisam-ud-din Junaidi, God's mercy be upon him, to complete this assignment. The said officer worked on the job for six years and toured the entire kingdom to complete the work of settlement. The revenue was finally settled by rule of inspection at 6 crore and seventy five lakh *tankas*. This amount remained the fixed revenue during all the forty years of Firuz Shah's reign.[129]

In determining the revenue the method of assessment adopted by him was the popular method of sharing with some modifications. Barani and Afif, both have described the revenue organization of Firuz Shah and we can form a fair picture of the

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[127] Firuz Shah, *Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi*, Eng. trans. Azra Alavi (Delhi : IAD, 1996) 22.
[128] R.C. Jauhri, *Firoz Tughluq 1351-88 A.D.*, 2nd ed. (Jalandhar : ABS, 1990) 94-95.
[129] Afif, trans. Jauhri 72.

system by putting their accounts together. Barani while describing Firuz Shah's second regulation says:

> It was ordered that the revenue-demand and the poll tax (*jiziya*) shall be collected according to the "rule of the produce" (*hukm-i hasil*); and "apportionments" (*qismat*), and "increase of demands", and "crop-failures" (*nabudha*), and "large demands based on surmise" (*tasawwuri*), were entirely removed from among the peasants; and revenue-farmers and land-wreckers and enhancement-mongers were not allowed to infest the provinces and the kingdom. And a reduction was made in the *mahsul-i mumalati*, so that the peasants may pay willingly without difficulty or severity; and no roughness or violence was used towards the cultivators, who are the keepers of the treasury (*bait-ul-mal*) of Moslems.[130]

Barani's 'rule of the produce' differs from Afif's 'rule of inspection'. In Moreland's view, the general idea conveyed by *mushahada* is "witnessing", "observing"; and in order to reconcile the two statements, all that is necessary is to take this word as denoting Sharing by estimation. Taking the accounts of Barani and Afif together we find that while Barani tells us that sharing prevailed in the time of Firuz Shah, Afif tells us that it was not actual sharing of the produce but sharing by estimation was promulgated by the Sultan which prevailed throughout his reign.[131] It is clear that in the collection of revenue, Firuz reverted back to the policy of Ghiyasuddin. Muhammad Tughluq had preferred the policy of Alauddin and the *jama* of their time was based to a considerable extent on actual measurement.

Barani also includes *jiziyah* as a tax to be levied along with kharaj, which shows that *jiziyah* was introduced as a

[130] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 231.

[131] See U.N. Day, *The Government of the Sultanate*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1993) 84; also Sri Ram Sharma, *Studies in Medieval Indian History* (Sholapur : Dayanand College, 1956) 146-156.

separate tax on the peasantry. This is also clear from a document of Firuz Shah's time where separate arguments are advanced for the collection of *kharaj* and *jiziyah* from deserting peasants.[132]

The most important and abiding contribution of Firuz Shah was the keen interest displayed by him in developing the means of irrigation. At least five new canals were excavated during this period.[133] The most important of these was a double system of canals passing through the vicinity of Karnal and entering the city of Hissar Firozah; one called *Rajab-wah* was taken from the Yamuna and the other called *Ulugh-khan*i was taken from the Sutluj.[134] The result was that the city of Hissar Firozah flourished with sufficient agriculture and habitation. "With more water through canals, enough water became available for irrigation. Wells could also be dug. With the abundance of water soaked, it was possible to find the water within four yards of digging the well."[135] New agricultural colonies sprang up along the canals with fifty-two colonies being established in the *Doab* alone.

Firuz Shah also tried to make the best of the advantages brought by the canals and encouraged the cultivation of superior crops such as wheat, sugarcane, lentils etc., and of superior qualities of fruit trees and flower plants.[136] The people of the territories through which the canals passed derived

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132 Ainuddin Abdullah bin Mahru, *Insha-i-Mahru*, partial Eng. trans. Shaikh Abdur Rashid (Lahore, 1965) 20-21.

133 The canals will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

134 Edward Thomas, *The Chronicles of the Pathan Kings of Delhi* (Delhi : Munshiram, 1967) 294-95.

135 Afif, trans. Jauhri 93.

136 Tripathi 286-87.

immense benefit from the improved and superior crops obtained due to the abundant water supplied by these canals. The Sultan, therefore, convened a meeting of the *Ulema* and asked them that, "if any person on account of his labour, effort and money constructed canals to provide water which may reach the villages and towns of the canal areas and people of those areas may derive immense profit, then was the builder of such canals, for his labour and effort, entitled for some payment in lieu thereof ?"[137] The *Ulema* informed that he could levy *Haq-i-Sharb* (water tax) at the rate of 1/10 of the total produce upon such cultivators as were benefitted by the scheme of artificial irrigation.[138] The Sultan accordingly charged water tax from the residents of these areas. Moreover, he brought dead and barren land under cultivation. The income from *Haq-i-Sharb* and newly cultivated lands amounted to approximately two lakh *tankas* which was excluded from the state exchequer and was a part of the Sultan's personal income. Such income constituted his privy purse. Separate officials were appointed to maintain accounts of these proceeds. The revenue from the Sultan's privy purse was distributed in charity to the religious divines and learned people.[139]

From the above account, it is clear that the revenue reforms of Firuz Shah enhanced the economic prosperity of the country. The fixing of a new *jama* would have given the

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[137] Afif, trans. Jauhri 93.
[138] Riaz-ul-Islam,"Sources of Revenue Under Firuz Shah Tughluq", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (1943) : 222-27.
[139] Afif, trans. Jauhri 94.

cultivator a fair proportion of the surplus. The revenue measures led to the extension of cultivation through the means of artificial irrigation, general prosperity of the people and increase in the revenue of the State.

The collapse of the dynasty founded by Ghiyasuddin Tughluq and the invasion of Timur almost obliterated the Sultanate of Delhi. The mighty fabric of the empire had been undermined by civil strife, rebellions, incompetence of the rulers and foreign invasions.[140] The Saiyyids (1414-1451) proved utterly unequal to the task of fighting anarchy. The limits of the empire were reduced and royal authority was weak. Revenue could be collected, only by sending military expeditions. The conditions thus provided ample opportunity for diversity of practice in assessment and collection and it is quite likely that each individual dealt with the peasants in the manner he chose. According to Moreland's surmise, "Group assessment gained ground at the expense of Sharing or Measurement because it was more suitable to the conditions which prevailed".[141] From a few stray instances it seems that the granting of assignments was the general practice followed by the Saiyyid Sultans.

However, with the accession of Bahlul Lodi (1451-89), the situation began to improve. He restored order within his dominions, defeated the Sharqi ruler and reduced the provincial chiefs to submission.[142] Bahlul Lodi left undisturbed the

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[140] H.G. Keene, *A Sketch of the History of Hindustan From the First Muslim Conquest to the Fall of the Mughol Empire* (Delhi : IAD, 1972) 44-45.
[141] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 67.
[142] For details see Habib and Nizami 675-84.

administrative system of his predecessors and contented himself by merely substituting his own officers and kinsmen. Every territory that he seized after a battle, he distributed it among the nobles and soldiers, and maintained a brotherly intercourse with them.[143] His government was based and carried on in the spirit of a clan. Sikandar Lodi told his nobles in 1494 on the eve of his struggle with the Sharqi Sultan, "You have served the cause of the late Sultan Bahlul Shah out of the spirit of belonging to the same *biraderi* (brotherhood)".[144] During this period, assignment was the most popular agrarian institution and the local commanders collected revenue through the time-honoured local agency without paying attention to the details of revenue administration.

The situation improved during the time of Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517) who began to show interest in revenue matters. Those who held *jagirs* were required to submit accounts regularly to the *diwan-i-wizarat*.[145] When the Sultan once assigned a *jagir*, to any noble, he did not change it unless he was guilty of misappropriation. If a noble was found guilty of any crime, he was never considered worthy of any favour. If the *iqtas* assigned to the nobles yielded a larger amount than was recorded in the papers of the *diwan* the assignees were allowed by the Sultan to keep it with them.[146]

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143 Shaikh Rizq Ullah Mushtaqui, *Waqiat-e-Mushtaqui*, ed. and Eng. trans. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui (New Delhi : NBC, 1993) 8.
144 Mushtaqui 28.
145 Revenue ministry. See Mushtaqui 32.
146 Mushtaqui 65.

The unit of revenue administration was the *Pargana*, a collection of villages. The *amil* was the collector of revenue in the *pargana*. He was 'a friend of the agriculturist' and also 'a representative of the lord paramount'.[147] Essentially his duties were to see that the assessed tax had been collected, that there was no fraud in the preparation of the revenue registers by the *muqaddams* and the schedule of the area under cultivation, and at the same time encourage cultivation.[148] Under Sikandar Lodi, the *amils* who were appointed for the administration of the *parganas* were not transferred.[149]

An important measure of Sikandar Lodi was that he introduced a standard unit of measurement known as *gazz-i sikandari* which continued to prevail till the Mughal period. Abul Fazl writes in the Ain-i Akbari :

> Sultan Sikandar Lodi in Hindustan introduced another *gaz* of the breadth of 41 *Iskandaris* and a half. This was a copper coin mixed with silver. Humayun added a half and it was thus completed to 42. Its length was 32 digits. Sher Khan and Salim Khan (Sur) under whom Hindustan was released from the custom of dividing the grain and its apportionment, in measuring land used this *gaz*. Till the thirty first-year of the Divine Era, although the *Akbar Shahi gaz* of 46 fingers was used as a cloth-measure, the *Iskandari gaz* was used for cultivated lands and buildings.[150]

In 1496, when a famine broke out in the empire, Sikandar Lodi stopped by a *farman* the levying of *zakat* on corn probably

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[147] Abul-Fazl Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Eng. trans. H.S. Jarrett, 2nd ed., Vol. III (Delhi : New Taj Office, 1989) 46.
[148] Abdul Halim, *History of the Lodi Sultans of Delhi and Agra* (Delhi : IAD, 1974) 247. The *Patwaris*, *Muqaddams* and *Chaudharis* occupied the lowest rung in revenue administration though the most directly concerned with land revenue assessment.
[149] Mushtaqui 18.
[150] Abul Fazl, *Ain* Vol. III 66.

to facilitate the smooth working of the schedule of rates and prevent hardship at the same time.[151] The Sultan and his nobles were seriously interested in the development of agriculture. Mushtaqui writes, "Not even a yard or an inch of land was left out of cultivation in the empire. Nobody could compel anybody. None could forcibly get a cot from the house of a peasant or press him for forced labour.[152] All chroniclers refer to the peace and prosperity prevailing during the reign of Sikandar. It is said that foodgrains, clothes and other articles were so cheap during his reign that even persons of modest incomes could live in happiness and contentment.[153]

During Ibrahim Lodi's reign (1517-26), the only change recorded in the agrarian system is the realization of land revenue in kind. The effect of this was that grain became very cheap and people of modest means could also live in reasonable comfort.[154] Exceptions to this rule must have been made in the case of greens and vegetables. The reasons for introducing this change have not been stated. Edward Thomas points out that there was great scarcity of precious metals and considerable paucity of the circulating media.[155] Payment of land-revenue in cash, would, therefore entail great difficulty. It is not certain whether Ibrahim Lodi's .policy of taking revenue in kind, was aimed at introducing a kind of uniformity in the method of

[151] Abdullah, *Tarikh-i-Daudi*, Eng. trans. Elliot and Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. IV (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, 1964) 462.
[152] Mushtaqui 17.
[153] *Daudi* 448.
[154] Awadh Bihari Pandey, *The First Afghan Empire in India 1451-1526 A.D.* (Calcutta : Bookland, 1956) 227.
[155] Thomas 435-36.

collection, or was due to the shortage of precious metals.[156] The result of this policy was that grain became very cheap because the officials who collected in kind required cash for their normal expenses, and therefore competed with each other to sell the grain as quickly as they could. Their need for money, and the competition in converting grain into cash lowered the prices very much. When supply was abundant and continuous the price of corn was bound to be very low. Obviously, this system could have worked only so long as no demand was made from the cultivators in cash, and barter was the normal means of transaction. It could not, however, continue long especially in cities. It was neither advantageous to the government nor conducive to trade and commerce.[157]

Though Sher Shah Sur ruled for a period of five years only, his land revenue reforms deserve special mention. The rule of the Surs was technically a part of the Sultanate. His system was the natural development of a long tradition; his institutions had their roots in the experiments of the Sultanate. Farid Khan[158] was the manager of his father's *jagirs* in Bihar and eastern Uttar

[156] It has been suggested that Ibrahim's order to the chiefs and nobles to collect land revenue in kind was a weapon aimed at reducing the income of the assignees and their power. He neatly shifted the burden of disposal of grain for cash from the village headmen and Hindu chiefs to the Afghan assignees – at a time of greatly increased yields. See John F. Richards, "The Economic History of the Lodi Period : 1451-1526" in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ed., *Morey and Market in India* (Delhi : OUP, 1998) 154-55.However, this explanation for the entire situation is not very convincing. That the slackening of money economy in the Lodi Empire had something to do with the worldwide scarcity of silver is difficult to refute. See Iqtidar Alam Khan, "The Fifteenth Century Economic Implications of Political Disintegration", Unpublished Proceedings of *Seminar on Economic History of Medieval India* Aligarh (1-3 February 2003) : 3-4.

[157] Tripathi 295.

[158] He later ascended the throne under the title of Sher Shah.

Pradesh during the reign of Sikandar Lodi, which provided him the experience of the working of the local revenue machinery and problems of peasants. The fundamental principles of the revenue reforms initiated by Farid at this stage were not exclusively original. Some of the ideas and experiments were the legacies of the Khalji and Tughluq regimes; and Sikandar Lodi had initiated reforms on these lines in his *khalisa* domains.[159]

Farid took up with vigour his scheme for the removal of agrarian abuses and for initiating reforms to eliminate further troubles. He put the interests of the peasantry foremost in his scheme of administrative reforms. He was aware that, "The cultivators are the source of prosperity; if a ruler cannot protect humble peasantry from the lawless, it is tyranny to exact revenue from them".[160] The main grievances of the peasantry were the heavy and arbitrary assessment of land revenue and the resultant arrears of rents, the veniality and unscrupulousness of revenue collectors, and the underhand exactions of the *patwaris* and *muqaddams* in collusion with the *amils*.

Farid's policy was to come into direct contact with the peasantry and their natural spokesmen and leaders, the *muqaddams* and *patwaris*. His first step was to give the peasants choice regarding the method of assessment of land revenue i.e. measurement or sharing. Some of the *raiyats* agreed to *jarib*

[159] Kalikaranjan Qanungo, *Sher Shah and his Times* (Bombay : Orient Longmans, 1965) 64.
[160] Abbas Khan Sarwani, *Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi* or *Tuhfa-i Akbar Shahi*, Eng. trans. Elliot and Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. IV (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, 1964) 314.

(measurement); others preferred payment in kind (*kismat-i ghalla*).[161] Accordingly he gave leases and took agreements; *kabuliyats* were taken from the *raiyats* in writing.[162] The payments for measuring the fields (*jaribana*) and the fees for the tax collectors and measurers (*muhassilana*) were fixed. He told the headmen that he was aware of the oppressions and exactions of which they had been guilty of towards the cultivators and to check such mal-practices, he had fixed the payments for measurements and the tax gatherers fees. He informed them that he would take the accounts of the fees in his own presence and would sanction the dues rightly taken; and compel the cultivators to pay them. There were to be two harvests – spring and autumn; and after each harvest revenue was to be realized.[163] Farid Khan's maxim was, "It is right for a ruler to show leniency to the cultivators at the period of measurement, and to have a regard to the actual produce; but when the time of payment comes he should show no leniency, but collect the revenue with all strictness".[164]

On his accession to the throne of Delhi, Sher Shah reorganized the administration in the light of his past experience. For the collection of revenue, there was appointed in each *pargana*[165], one *amin*, one *shiqdar*, one treasurer (*khazanadar*),

[161] Sarwani 313. Measurement was denoted by *jarib*, sharing by *kismat-i ghalla*. For *'jarib'* see Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System* 240-41, 259-60.

[162] It seems that these *kabuliyats* from cultivators were written for them by the *patwaris* and *muqaddams* and duly attested. Qanungo 62.

[163] Sarwani 313.

[164] Sarwani 313-14.

[165] As before, a *pargana* consisting of several villages remained the effective unit of administration. According to Mushtaqui, under Sher Shah all the *parganas* numbered to one lakh and thirteen thousand.

one karkun to write Hindi and one to write Persian.[166] The amin seems to have been appointed in *parganas* to measure the land under cultivation either for determining the state demand of land revenue or knowing the exact yield (*jama*) of a *pargana* or an *iqta*. The other subordinate officers kept the records of the cultivated land as well as of the produce and helped both the *amil* (revenue collector) and the *muqaddams*. In addition to them, the *qanungo* is also mentioned as charged with the duty of maintaining the revenue papers on the basis of which they helped the revenue collectors (*amils*) by providing them with information about the revenue collection in the previous years. They also speculated about the coming year. The *shiqdars* were not only responsible for the maintenance of peace and order but also helped the revenue collectors (*amils*) in collecting the revenue in their respective *parganas*.[167]

The *parganas* were grouped into districts called *sarkars*. In every *sarkar*, there were a *shiqdar-i-shiqdaran* (chief *shiqdar*) and a *munsif-i-munsifan* (chief *munsif*), who were appointed to watch the conduct of the *amils* and the people so that the *amils* would not oppress or injure the people or embezzle the king's revenue. Instructions were given to the district officers that "If the people, from any lawlessness or rebellious spirit, created a disturbance regarding the collection of the revenue, they were so to eradicate and destroy them with

[166] Mushtaqui 139; Sarwani 413.
[167] Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *Some Aspects of Afghan Despotism in India* (Aligarh : Three Men, 1969) 142.

punishment and chastisement that their wickedness and rebellion should not spread to others".[168] Sher Shah began to change the *amils* after every two years against the traditions of Sikandar Lodi for the post of the *amil* was very lucrative and the king wanted as many of his servants to share the benefits as possible.[169]

As King, Sher Shah discouraged the system of division of crops and tried to enforce measurement on practically the whole of his dominions.[170] The methods of crop sharing and farming for the assessment of state share of revenue were abolished and that of measurement was not only retained but almost carried on everywhere. Sher Shah "ordered his governors to measure the land every harvest, to collect the revenue according to the measurement".[171] Moreland observes that, "there can be no doubt that measurement was the general rule in practice, and not merely in theory".[172] He tried to enforce measurement as extensively as he possibly could with the exception of the territory of Multan, which was laid waste by the Biloch chiefs after the fall of the Langahs. The *muqta* of Dipalpur and Multan, Fath Jang, was ordered to follow the traditions of the Langahs with regard to the revenue administration and re-people the area as much as possible. The *muqta*, therefore, realized one-fourth of the land-produce by the

[168] Sarwani 414.
[169] Sarwani 414.
[170] His ideas were similar to those of Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq who preferred measurement.
[171] Sarwani 413.
[172] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 75.

division of crop as it was the custom in Multan.[173]

As regards the State demand, Sarwani says that one share was to be given to the cultivator and half a share to the headman. This would mean that a third was claimed by the State as its share.[174] This is corroborated by a schedule of Sher Shah's assessment rates incorporated in the Ain-i-Akbari which states that :

> Of the two first kinds of land, there are three classes, good, middling and bad. They add together the produce of each sort, and a third of this represents the medium produce, one-third part of which is exacted as the royal dues. The revenue levied by Sher Khan, which at the present day is represented in all provinces as the lowest rate of assessment, generally obtained, and for the convenience of the cultivators and the soldiery, the value was taken in ready money.[175]

This shows that the State demand was based on average produce. From the point of view of the fertility of the soil, the cultivable land was classified into three categories, good, middling and bad. For all the chief crops, the good, middling and bad produce per *bigha* were added up and one third of the total was taken as the average produce. One third of this average was taken as the revenue demand. For example: For a *Sikandari bigah*,[176] wheat was calculated to yield 18 *maunds* (good), 12 *maunds* (middling) and 18 *maunds* 35 *sers* (bad). The average produce was obtained by totalling these figures and dividing by three and it comes to 12 *maunds* 38⅓ *sers*, but it was taken as 12

173 Siddiqui, *Afghan Despotism* 163.
174 Sarwani 413-14.
175 Abul Fazl, *Ain* Vol. III 68.
176 Sher Shah used the *Sikandari gaz*.

maunds 38¼ *sers*. The revenue demand on each *bigha* of wheat was 4 *maunds* 12¾ *sers*.[177]

It is not known whether this schedule (*ray*) held good for the whole kingdom or whether there were different local schedules. A single schedule would however, have created difficulties in revenue collection owing to variations in local produce, prices and in the nature of soil, rainfall and other climatic conditions. Whether the revenue was collected in cash or kind is not clear. Sher Shah's schedule mentions no cash basis for grain but in case of perishable articles, the State could obviously not accept its share in kind.[178]

Sher Shah's most important contribution seems to have been the introduction of *ray* or schedule of the crop-rates of assessment. Apart from this, no large-scale changes seem to have been introduced in the agrarian system. Sher Shah was a reformer and not an innovator. His sole aim was to infuse vitality and efficiency in the administration.[179]

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[177] Abul Fazl, *Ain* Vol. III 69.
[178] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 75-76.
[179] Tripathi 305.

Chapter 3

RURAL CLASSES : Rural Aristocracy; *Khots* and *Muqaddams*; Peasantry

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate inaugurated a new era in India's political history. It meant the liquidation of the multi-state system, which had become a feature of Indian political life during the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the rise of a consolidated and centralized political organization; which withstood the onslaughts of even the Mongol invaders.[1] The question arises – whether it marked any kind of break in economic history as well.[2] Mohammad Habib offered an assessment of the economic changes following the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. He believed that the new regime was qualitatively different from the one it had supplanted and that it released social forces, which created an economic organization considerably superior to the one that had existed before. He suggested that there was an expansion of the towns and an important alteration in agrarian relationships. Mohammad Habib felt that the changes were so fundamental as to deserve the designations of 'urban' and 'rural' revolutions.[3]

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[1] Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Religion and Politics in India During the Thirteenth Century*, new ed. (New Delhi : OUP,2002)89.

[2] This question has been raised by Irfan Habib in his paper, "The Economic History of the Delhi Sultanate: An Essay in Interpretation", *The Indian Historical Review*, Vol. IV no.2 (1978).

[3] Mohammad Habib, *Introduction to a new edition of Elliot and Dowson's History of India as Told By Its Own Historians*, Vol. II (Aligarh : Cosmopolitan,1952) 37-82.

The assertions made by Mohammad Habib need substantiation. To what extent were agrarian relationships altered and how? What were the chief instruments of change in the agrarian sector? What were the changes that occurred in the method of land revenue collection? Land revenue continued to be the main source of state income under the Turkish regime.[4] Their principal achievements lay in a great systematization of agrarian exploitation and an immense concentration of the resources so obtained. This ensured that the land revenue (*kharaj/mal*) demanded on their behalf should comprehend the bulk, if not the whole, of the peasant's surplus produce; and the king's bureaucracy thereby became the principal exploiting class in society.[5] The economic changes, following the establishment of Turkish rule, though fundamental and radical, were not immediate nor in the nature of a 'revolution'. We may isolate the *iqta* and the *kharaj* as the two chief instruments of change in the agrarian sector.

The idea of paying a share of the produce to the ruler was no novelty to the Hindu subjects of the Sultans of Delhi.[6] The really important question for the new rulers was the selection of a competent and trustworthy agency for the collection of the *kharaj*. The situation evidently called for

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[4] No branch of Indian administration has greater administrative continuity through the ages than the land revenue policy and administration. Ashirbadi Lal Srivastava, *Akbar The Great*, 2nd ed., Vol. II (Agra : Shivlal Agarwala &Co.,1973) 160.

[5] Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History:Towards a Marxist Perception* (New Delhi : Tulika,1995) 81.

[6] The *niti-shastras* freely acknowledge the right of the king to levy it. See Vishnu, *Smriti*, Eng. trans. Julius Jolly, *The Institutes of Vishnu*, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. VII (1880; Delhi : Motilal, 1965) III,22,16.

recognition of intermediaries. Moreland uses the term 'Intermediaries' to denote all the various classes authorised or permitted by the king to collect his share, and to retain a portion or the whole. These may be classed as Chiefs, Representatives, Assignees, Grantees and Farmers.[7]

The Hindu chiefs i.e. *Rais*, *Ranas* and *Rawats* had long traditions of authority and could command the loyalty and support of peasantry living in their territories. They were allowed to continue collecting the revenues from the peasants on condition of paying a lump sum to the Delhi Sultanate as tribute.[8] The Hindu chief was the link between the provincial governor, usually, a Muslim, and the Hindu peasants.[9] Moreland's 'Representatives' were the village headmen, the *khots*, *muqaddams* and *chaudharis*, who collected the revenue from the peasants on behalf of the state for which they were given special concessions.[10] Very different from such headmen was the tax-farmer, who contracted with the state for the collection of revenue for an extensive area.

In order to form a clear picture of the agrarian relations under the Delhi Sultanate, the rural classes may be divided into the rural aristocracy which comprised the *rais*, *ranas* and *rawats*; the village headmen i.e. the *khots* and

[7] W.H. Moreland, *The Agrarian System of Moslem India* (1929;New Delhi : Atlantic,1994)8.
[8] Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi* (New Delhi : Oriental Reprint,1971) 119.
[9] Agha Mahdi Husain, *Tughluq Dynasty* (New Delhi : S. Chand & Co.,1976 reprint) 12.
[10] R.P. Tripathi, *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration* (1936;Allahabad : Central Book Depot,1922) 256-57.

muqaddams and finally the peasantry which constituted the lowest rural class.

I

The rural aristocracy during the Sultanate period comprised the Hindu Chiefs of the previous regime designated as *rais*, *ranas* and *rawats*. This was the class of ruling landed aristocracy, which enjoyed power and privileges on account of interest in land.[11] The peasants were attached to the soil owned by them, paying rent in kind and labour. Very probably, *rajas*, *rajaputras*, *ranakas*, *rajarajanakas*, *mahasamantas*, *mahasamantadhipatis* etc. mentioned in the Pala land charters were mostly vassals connected with land. Some were vanquished and reinstated in their territories; others were probably granted land for their military service, which both classes had to furnish to their overlord.[12]

Minhaj Siraj designates the chiefs opposing the Ghorians and the early Delhi Sultans as *rais* and *ranas*.[13] The cavalry commanders or knights of the *rais* were called *rawats* (*rautas*). Military beneficiaries appear as a very numerous class

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[11] The Ghorian conquest of India led to the substitution of the Ghorian Turks for the '*Thakurs*' as the governing class. The Arabian and Ghaznavide authorities generally refer to the warrior class as '*Thakurs*' and our thirteenth century sources divide these classes into the three grades of *rais*, *ranas* and *rawats*. See B.N.S. Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century* (Allahabad : Central Book Depot,1973) 137.

[12] R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism: c A.D. 300-1200*, 2nd ed. (Delhi : Macmillan,1980) 69.The word *rajas* is synonymous with *rais*.

[13] Minhaj-us-Siraj, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, Eng. Trans. H.G. Raverty, Vol. I (New Delhi : Oriental,1970) 346, 379, 516, 521, 523, 546, 690, 691, 733, 743 etc.

of grantees in our inscriptions, and are known as *rautas* under the Chandellas and Gahadvalas, and the *rajaputras* under the Chalukyas. The term *rauta* is an early vernacular form of the Sanskrit *rajaputra*, and it possibly indicated a rank in medieval times. The Chandella grants leave no doubt that the *rautas* were granted land for military service. Thus the *rauta* seems to have been a vassal whose dominant function in the state was rendering military service, which, according to the *Lekhapaddhati*, was also the most important obligation of his counterpart, the *rajaputra*.[14] Barani also uses the term *rais* and *ranas* to refer to the Hindu chiefs or the rural aristocracy of the previous regime.[15] The *rawats* were lower in status than the *ranas*. Barani writes that when Malik Chhaju, governor of Kara revolted during the reign of Jalaluddin Khalji (1290-1296), the *rawats* and *paiks* of Hindustan flocked around him like ants or locusts, and the most noted of them received betel from him, and promised to fight against the standards of the Sultan.[16] Similarly, when Sultan Jalaluddin attacked Ranthambhor in1290 A.D., the *Rai* of Ranthambhor, with his *Rawats* and followers took refuge in the fort of Ranthambhor.[17]

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate led to the replacement of the *samanta* system with the *iqta* system; and

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[14] See Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* 127-169 for a detailed account of political feudalism during 1000-1200 A.D.

[15] Ziauddin Barani, *Tarikh-i-Firozshahi*, Eng. Trans. Elliot and Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. III (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, n.d.) 102-103.

[16] Barani, *Tarikh* 138. *Paiks* were foot soldiers.

[17] Barani, *Tarikh* 146.

thus substituted the old ruling class with a new bureaucracy. The *iqta* had existed since the early days of Islam and meant an assignment of revenue conditional on future service. It was a transferable revenue assignment (on *kharaji* lands) allotted to the members of the ruling class. The *iqta* assignees were designated *muqtis* or *walis* and they paid to the sovereign a specified amount of *kharaj* or offered presents in cash or kind every year and rendered military service to the state when needed. The *muqti* was a kind of revenue collector, commander and administrator rolled into one.[18]

There are several references in *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* of conquered territories placed in charge of military commanders.[19] However, the Turkish conquerors did not oust the local chiefs (*rais*, *ranas*, *rajas* etc.) as proprietors of land. We may therefore infer that the local potentates went on collecting taxes as before, and some of the revenue so collected, went as a tribute to the Sultan's assignees.

The Sultan and the *muqtis* made use of the existing fiscal structure for expediency because their authority was as yet tenuous. It was expedient to maintain the inherited structure of rural society and utilize it for collecting land tax. However, when the Hindu chiefs, in writing, gave an undertaking to pay the revenue to the new government, it was with a clear mental reservation that they would pay nothing unless compelled to do

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[18] For a definition of the classical *iqta*, see Nizam-ul-Mulk Tusi's *Siyasatnama*, Eng. Trans. Hubert Darke, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings* (London : Routledge,1960) 33.

[19] Siraj, Vol. I 464, 469.

so at the point of the sword.[20] In Moreland's view also, the establishment of Islamic rule would take one of two forms. If the Hindu King or Chief submitted, and agreed to pay tribute, things would go on as before, except that the Chief, no longer a King, would probably try to recover the amount of the tribute from his villages by increasing the demand on them, a process which would be possible in some conditions, if not in all. If the King or Chief did not submit, and lost his position by conquest, the conquerors would step into his place, and would probably continue the existing relations with the villages as the line of least resistance, until circumstances arose which called for a change.[21]

During the thirteenth century, the Hindu Chiefs were the dominant factor in the situation and were thus sufficiently numerous and powerful.[22] The position of the Islamic governors (*wali*, *muqti*) was at times precarious, and the force at their disposal was probably insufficient for the effective subjugation of the territory in their charge. Since the *rais* and *ranas* were expected to go on collecting revenue as before, the immediate control of the older ruling class over the land and the peasantry continued. The peasant might have had to pay more, as now a tribute had to be paid to the *muqti* from the revenues collected. Even this arrangement was not possible in some territories and

[20] Habib, *Introduction* 72. The tribute paid by the Chiefs does not appear to have been rigidly fixed, or always realized with regularity. The very fact that they had submitted was sometimes taken as enough.

[21] Moreland, *Agrarian System*, 202.

[22] The Kasrak copper plate inscription points this out. See Pushpa Prasad, 'Agrarian Potentates in Katehar in the 13th century in the light of the Kasrak Copper Plate Inscription', paper read at *Indian History Congress*, Bhubaneshwar (1977)

plundering expeditions and raids were carried out in the neighbouring territories of independent Hindu Chiefs. The plunder was mainly of cattle and slaves. Minhaj refers to numerous expeditions led into the rebellious territories (*mawasat*) to extort tribute and plunder.[23]

During the years 1236-66, the *rais* and *ranas* were still numerous and powerful. This becomes clear from Balban's (*Ulugh Khan-e-Azam*) biography in the *Ṭabaqat-i-Nasiri*.[24]It also appears that often the tracts of country assigned *as iqtas* were not fully subdued and it was the task of the *muqti* to chastize those tracts. Minhaj writes, "The fief of Riwari was entrusted to his (Balban's) charge; and when, he proceeded to that part, he thoroughly chastized the independent (Hindu) tribes of Koh-payah by the power of his valour and reduced those tracts under his jurisdiction."[25]

Frequent references are made to various *rais* and *ranas* who were still independent and wealthy also, as each subsequent expedition against them yielded enormous booty.[26] This indicates that income from land revenue was insufficient and plunder was an important source of income for the state. The interesting point is that the peasantry seemingly had two masters: the Sultan's governor (*wali, muqti*) and the *rana*. If the *rana* withheld the revenue, the matter was put right through military force; if the rebellion was widespread, the Sultan himself would

[23] Siraj, Vol. II 728, 733, 737, 755, 757, etc.
[24] Siraj, Vol. II 800-865.
[25] Siraj, Vol. II 806.
[26] Siraj Vol. II 816, 818, 828, 838 etc.

lead or send a punitive expedition to put matters right[27].

Thus, it appears that in the thirteenth century, the older ruling class was sufficiently prominent to dominate the situation. The authority of the Hindu Chiefs waxed and waned vis-à-vis the strength of the Central Government. During the reigns of Iltutmish(1211-1236) and Balban (1266-1286) things seemed stabilized, though Balban undoubtedly had a hard task[28] and as mentioned earlier had to send punitive expeditions to set matters right. Probably, the Chiefs, regarded as a whole, were at least as strong in the middle of the century as at its close, and they were stronger at the beginning than in the middle.[29]

With the passage of time and the increasing authority of the Sultan's government, efforts were made to curb the power of the local chiefs and replace them with members of the new ruling class. This was accomplished gradually through the *iqta* system.[30] Even when the authority of the Sultanate over the country was asserted more vigorously, and an arbitrary tribute was replaced by a land tax assessed on the peasants, the older aristocracy still had a place. Alauddin Khalji was an Islamic ruler of a non-Islamic land and he knew he could only govern on principles acceptable to the Hindu masses. So he left the hereditary *rais* and their people to their traditional ways of life, subject to the payment of tribute. Of course, while the Sultanate

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[27] Barani mentions several such expeditions of Balban e.g. see Barani, *Tarikh* 106.
[28] Nizami, *Religion and Politics* 139.
[29] Moreland, *Agrarian System*, 29.
[30] When the power of the *muqtis* increased and the *iqtas* began to yield surplus revenues.

was strong, these chiefs paid their dues regularly and consequently references to them are occasional. Alauddin was prepared to compromise with the Hindu *rais* who came to his court. Amir Khusrau writes in the *Khazainul Futuh* with reference to the year 1305:

> When the lancers of the victorious army had put antimony into the eyes of the more distinguished *rais* with their spears, many powerful *Zamindars*, gifted with greater keenness of vision, threw aside their boldness and impudence from fear of the stone-piercing arrows of the Turks. They came to the imperial court with open eyes and turned its threshold into antimony by rubbing their black pupils upon it; at the same time they saved their bones from becoming antimony-boxes for the dust. The Emperor regarded every one of them with an affectionate glance, and threw on them a ray of his favour, which their eyes had never expected to behold. Finally, no impudent infidel remained in the provinces of Hind; some had gone to sleep on the scarlet-coloured bed of (imperial) punishment; others had opened their eyes and bowed in obedience before the court.[31]

Barani in his *Fatawa-i-Jahandari* also writes about the leniency shown by Alauddin Khalji towards the older rural aristocracy:

> But the desire for overthrowing infidels and knocking down idolators does not fill the hearts of the Muslim kings (of India). On the other hand, out of consideration for the fact that the infidels and polytheists are payers of tribute and protected persons (*zimmis*) these infidels are honoured, distinguished, favoured and made eminent; the kings bestow drums, banners, ornaments, cloaks of brocade and caparisoned horses upon them, and appoint them to governorships, high posts and offices.... They are equipped with a hundred thousand sources of strength. They live in delights and comforts. They take *Mussalmans* into their service and make them run before their horses; the poor

[31] Amir Khusrau, *Khazainul Futuh*, Eng. Trans. Mohammad Habib, *The Campaigns of Alauddin Khalji* in K.A. Nizami, ed., *Politics And Society During The Early Medieval Period: Collected Works of Professor Mohammad Habib*, Vol. II (New Delhi : PPH,1981) 185.

Mussalmans beg of them at their doors; and in the capital of Islam, owing to which the edifice of Islam is elevated, they are called *rais* (great rulers), *ranas* (minor rulers), *thakurs* (warriors), *sahas* (bankers), *mehtas* (administrators), and *pundits* (priests).[32]

Alauddin Khalji showed consideration towards the rulers of the South whom he subjugated. Alauddin sent an expedition under Malik Kafur in 1307 against Ramdeo of Deogir as the latter had rebelled, and for several years had not sent his tribute to Delhi. However, when Ramdeo sued for peace, Barani informs us that the Sultan showed great favour to the *rai*, gave him the title of *Rai-rayan* (King of kings) and confirmed Deogir in his possession. The *rai* was ever after obedient and sent tribute regularly.[33]

During the reign of Firuz Shah, the Hindu Chiefs enjoyed a privileged position. *Rai* Bhiru Bhatti remained in attendance to Sultan Firuz Shah after the latter escaped from the trap laid for him in Khudwandzada's house.[34] The chiefs had rebelled when the disorganisation of Muhammad Tughluq's administration gave them an opportunity[35]; but when the royal army reached their country they submitted and renewed their engagements. Barani mentions that when Firuz Tughluq was marching through Gorakhpur, Kharosa and Tirhut on an expedition to Lakhnauti, the *rais* of Gorakhpur and Kharosa who

[32]Ziauddin Barani, *Fatawa-i-Jahandari*, Eng. trans. Mohammad Habib and Afsar Salim Khan, *The Political History of the Delhi Sultanate* (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, n.d.) 46-48.

[33] Barani, *Tarikh* 200.

[34] Shams-i-Siraj Afif, *Tarikh-i-Firozshahi*, Eng. Trans. R.C. Jauhri, *Medieval India in Transition–Tarikh-i-Firozshahi A First Hand Account* (New Delhi : Sundeep,2001) 77-78.

[35] Barani, *Tarikh* 237.

had withheld their payments made their submission to the Sultan and followed him to Lakhnauti. [36]

In the period after Firuz Shah's death, the Hindu Chiefs became rebellious because fear of the army, which made them obedient in the payment of tribute, had completely vanished. During the rule of the Saiyyids (1414-1451), the royal authority was weak and the Sultanate of Delhi shrank in dimensions. Innumerable half-hearted punitive campaigns were undertaken against refractory chiefs but they came to an end abruptly when the erring chief paid some tribute or made a dubious promise for its payment in future.[37] Moreland rightly observes:

> It is a striking fact that in these expeditions Governors and Chiefs were treated very much on the same footing. The King marches towards Gwalior; the Chiefs pay the customary revenue, or do not pay it, as the case may be. He marches towards Badaun, and the Governor either comes to meet him and settle his accounts, or else shuts himself up in the fort, and is treated as a rebel. The position for the time being resembled that which we shall meet in the eighteenth century, when all titles and jurisdictions became confounded in the *taluq* or 'dependency', that is to say, the area over which an individual, whether governor or Assignee, whether Farmer or Chief, exercised de facto authority.[38]

The position of the Chiefs remained unchanged in the sixteenth century. As in the fourteenth century, they were

[36] Afif, trans. Jauhri 85 ; also Eng. Trans. Elliot and Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. III (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, n.d.) 294.

[37] Several such punitive expeditions are mentioned in Yahya bin Ahmad Sihrindi's *Tarikh-i-Mubarakshahi*, trans. Elliot &Dowson, Vol. IV (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, 1964) e.g.47, 48, 49, 59, 61, 62.

[38] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 66.

Intermediaries between the peasants and the central authority; and, where they existed, the assignee had to look to them, and not to the peasants, for his Income.[39]

II

Below the rural aristocracy were the village headmen– *khots* and *muqaddams*, who were the agents of revenue collection. The villages, which were not under Chiefs were managed through their headmen. Thus, in the areas where the Muslims were in direct contact with the peasants, the position of the headmen was recognised. Besides getting their dues for the work of revenue collection, they were allowed liberal concessions in holding land and pastures for themselves.[40] Moreland designates this class as 'representatives' and they were the chief figures in what Moreland calls 'group-assessment'. The amount to be paid by a village for the King's share was commonly settled, season by season, or year by year, between the official assessor and the headmen acting on behalf of the peasants. The area sown, or expected to be sown, was taken into account, along with other circumstances, but the assessment was a lump sum, which the headmen subsequently distributed among the peasants.[41]

Moreland's representatives are to be identified with

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[39] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 71.
[40] Tripathi 257.
[41] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 9.

Barani's *khots*, *muqaddams* and *chaudharis*.[42] Barani has designated them as men of the highest stratum among the peasantry.[43] *Muqaddam* is an Arabic word meaning 'the first man' and is often used specifically to denote village headman. The use of the designation continued down to the present century. The identity of the word *khot* is doubtful. Barani uses the word antithetically to *balahar*.[44] *Balahar* has been identified as a low caste menial by Blochmann. This indicates that the two terms *khot* and *balahar* stand for the two extremes in rural society. The latter was a low caste village menial who was allotted a small plot for his bare subsistence by the village community while the *khot* signified the village headman who may have undertaken to collect the revenue of the villages put in his charge by the government.[45]

According to S.H. Hodivala, landholders called *khots* are to be found still in Gujarat and the Deccan. The word may be derived from the Sanskrit '*Kuta*' which means chief or head. The village headman is called '*Gramakuta*' in the grants of the Vallabhi kings. '*Grama*' means village and '*Kuta*' (or *Kuda*), chief or leader.[46] The term *khot* remained in use till the middle of the sixteenth century in the *Doab* and probably longer in the

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[42] Barani, *Tarikh* 182.

[43] Tapan Ray Chaudhary and Irfan Habib, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of India 1200-1750*, Vol. I (Hyderabad : Orient,1984) 54.

[44] Barani, *Tarikh* 182.

[45] The word *khot* is commonly coupled with *muqaddam* (headman) making it clear that the perquisites of the *khots* were the same as those of the headmen.

[46] S.H. Hodivala, *Studies in Indo Muslim History* (Bombay : Popular,1939) 277. According to Hodivala, the derivation of *Khot* from *Kuta* is not without difficulties, but it is fairly certain that the word is not of Arabic origin.

Gujarat and the Deccan.[47]

The word *Chaudhari* is not mentioned by Minhaj Siraj or any earlier Persian source, but Barani uses it as an equivalent to *muqaddam*.[48] *Chaudhari* was the headman of the *pargana* which was an aggregate of villages.[49] Ibn Battuta mentions that there was in each *sadi*, a *chaudhari* who was the head of the Hindus.[50] This implies that the *chaudhari* was selected, in some manner, to represent the peasants.

The village headmen enjoyed great concessions from the beginning of the Islamic rule and lived a life of ease and comfort. This is clear from the complaints about them which Alauddin Khalji made to *Qazi* Mughisuddin of Bayana:

> I have discovered that the *khuts* and *muqaddims* ride upon fine horses, wear fine clothes, shoot with Persian bows, make war upon each other, and go out hunting; but of the *kharaj* (tribute), *jizya* (poll-tax), *kari* (house tax), and *chari* (pasture tax), they do not pay one *jital*. They levy separately the *khut's* (landowner's) share from the villages, give parties and drink wine, and many of them pay no revenue at all, either upon demand or without demand. Neither do they show any respect for my officers.[51]

Alauddin adopted a strong policy to remedy the situation. Barani tells us that Alauddin Khalji issued two regulations so

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[47] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 225-26

[48] Barani, *Tarikh* 182-83.

[49] See Moreland, *Agrarian System* 19, 276.

[50] Ibn Battuta, *Rehla*, Eng. trans. Mahdi Husain (Baroda : Oriental Institute,1976) 123. *Sadi*, according to Battuta was a collection of hundred villages but it is not mentioned by any other contemporary authority. *Sadi* and *pargana* were in practice identical units.

[51] Barani, *Tarikh* 184-85. The house tax was also called '*ghari*'. The landowner's share was called '*huquq-i-khuti*' or '*qismat-i-khoti*'.

that there was "one rule for the payment of tribute applicable to all, from the *khuta* to the *balahar*, and the heaviest tribute was not to fall on the poorest."[52]

The first regulation (*zabita*) adopted measurement of the cultivable land as the principle for determining the land revenue, with the *biswa* as the standard unit of measurement. The share of the state was fixed at half of the produce which was to be realised "without any diminution", and "this rule was to apply to *khutas* and *balahars*, without the slightest distinction".[53] The *khots* were also to be deprived of their perquisites i.e. '*huquq-i-khoti*'. The second regulation relates to a levy on all milk-giving cattle. A tax for pasturage at a fixed rate, was levied and demanded 'for every inhabited house, so that no animal, however wretched could escape the tax.' The rules for the payment of tribute were to apply equally to all rich or poor, high or low.[54] Barani mentions neither any limitations of nor any exemptions from *charai* i.e. the tax on milch cattle. Ferishta, however states that holdings upto two pairs of oxen, a pair of buffaloes, two cows and ten goats were exempt from the levy.[55] But since neither Ferishta's source of information is known, nor does Barani indicate any exemptions, Ferishta's figures cannot be accepted as entirely reliable.

The above two regulations show that Alauddin Khalji deprived the *khots* of their special privileges. They were forced

[52] Barani, *Tarikh* 182.
[53] Barani, *Tarikh* 182.
[54] Barani, *Tarikh* 182.
[55] Muhammad Qasim Ferishta, *Tarikh-i-Ferishta*, Eng. Trans. J. Briggs, *History of the Rise of the Mahomedan Power in India*, Vol. I (Calcutta : Cambray &Co.,1966) 197.

to pay the full land tax on their cultivated lands and were prohibited from levying any cess. The *khots* were also not exempted from *ghari* (house tax) and *charai* (tax on milch cattle). Now the *khots*, *muqaddams* and *chaudharis* could not exempt themselves from paying revenue and make other peasants share the entire tax burden due from the village.[56] Alauddin did not abolish the '*khoti*' system, since there was no machinery to replace it even if he had liked to do so. His sole object was to abolish privileges that were enjoyed at the expense of the government and contributed to disorders and difficulties in revenue collection.[57] The headmen were thus suppressed and Barani mentions that:

> The regulations were so strictly carried out that the *chaudhuris* and *khuts* and *muqaddims* were not able to ride on horseback, to find weapons, to get fine clothes or to indulge in betel. The same rules for the collection of the tribute applied to all alike, and the people were brought to such a state of obedience that one revenue officer would string twenty *khuts*, *muqaddims*, or *chaudhuris* together by the neck, and enforce payment by blows. No Hindu could hold up his head , and in their houses no sign of gold or silver, *tankas* or *jitals*, or of any superfluity was to be seen. These things, which nourish insubordination and rebellion, were no longer to be found. Driven by destitution, the wives of the *khuts* and *muqaddims* went and served for hire in the houses of the *Mussalmans*.[58]

The stringent regulations of Alauddin Khalji enabled him to break the power of the intermediaries i.e. the local *khots*, *muqaddams* and *chaudharis* and thus bridge the gap between the

[56] U.N. Day, *Some Aspects of Medieval Indian History* (New Delhi : Kumar,1971) 99.
[57] Tripathi 259.
[58] Barani, *Tarikh* 182-83. By Hindu Barani means the upper class Hindus, not the peasants.

peasantry and the state. The headmen were reduced practically to the position of the ordinary peasant. They continued to get their dues for services but nothing more.

However, the regulations lasted only during the lifetime of the Sultan and fell into disuse in the reign of his successor Qutbuddin Mubarak Khalji (1316-1320) and the condition of the *khots* and *muqaddams* improved considerably. Barani writes:

> Through the diminution of their tribute, the Hindus again found pleasure and happiness, and were beside themselves with joy. They who had plucked the green ears of corn because they could not get bread, who had not a decent garment, and who had been so harassed by corporal punishments that they had not even time to scratch their heads, now put on fine apparel, rode on horseback, and shot their arrows. Through all the reign of Kutbu-ddin, not one of the old Rules and Regulations remained in force.[59]

Ghiyasuddin Tughluq did not believe in Alauddin Khalji's principle of levelling down the village headman to the rank of the ordinary peasant. He urged the *muqtis* and governors to be vigilant and consistent so that Chiefs and headmen were prevented from imposing a separate assessment on the peasants apart from the king's revenue.[60] At the same time, he fully realized the utility of their services in the process of collecting the government demand. They had been performing this duty for generations and had acquired experience and traditional dignity. So he ordered the restoration of their perquisites to prevent them

[59] Barani, *Tarikh* 213.
[60] Mahdi Husain, *Tughluq Dynasty* 62.

from making an additional demand. The *khots* and *muqaddams* were once again exempted from paying *kharaj* and *charai*.[61] Thus, Ghiyasuddin accorded a lenient but firm treatment to the village headmen. Their perquisites and status were restored, but they were prevented from becoming mischievous or defiant.

When, following Ghiyasuddin's concessions to the *khots* and *muqaddams*, Muhammad Tughluq (1325-1351) increased revenue demand and imposed additional cesses on the peasantry in the *Doab*, it led to a massive peasant rebellion led by the upper strata of the rural agrarian society– presumably the *khots* and *muqaddams*.[62] The Sultan adopted harsh measures for their suppression. Barani writes, "Under the orders of the Sultan, the collectors and magistrates laid waste the country, and they killed some landholders and village chiefs and blinded others. Such of these unhappy inhabitants as escaped formed themselves into bands and took refuge, in the jungles."[63] This peasant rebellion led by the *khots* and *muqaddams* indicates that the two rural classes united when they were alike hit by the newly imposed burden though at all other times the superior elements i.e. the headmen tried to impose their burden upon the weak peasants.

During the liberal reign of Sultan Firuz Tughluq (1351-1388), the village headmen benefitted progressively from

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[61] Mohammad Habib and K.A.Nizami, *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. V (New Delhi : PPH,1970) 468.
[62] See Agha Mahdi Husain, *The Rise and Fall of Muhammad Bin Tughluq* (Delhi : IAD, 1972) 148-157.
[63] Barani, *Tarikh* 242.

the general prosperity prevailing in the kingdom and this must have made them less inclined to exploit the peasants under their control. Shams-i-Siraj Afif writes, "During the reign of Firuz Shah.... All men, high and low, bond and free, lived happily and free from care."[64]

Thus the village headmen formed the rural gentry; they were peasants standing on the borderland of the rural aristocracy. They enjoyed great privileges and a high standard of life. Their own lands were free from assessment. Alauddin Khalji took stern action against them and curtailed many of their privileges. Even then they continued to enjoy a higher standard of life than the ordinary peasants. It seems that after the death of Alauddin, they were able to resume their old ways.

The fourteenth century saw the process of the transformation of the older aristocracy into a new superior rural class. Initially, the Sultans came to terms with the immediate control of the older ruling class over the land and the peasantry. But soon they started transforming the older aristocracy into a new superior rural class. This superior class had to absorb elements of the older aristocracy, while perhaps admitting some from the village headmen (*khots* and *muqaddams*).[65]

The *chaudhari* was the first representative of the newly emerging class, who became the hereditary *zamindar* in charge of the collection of revenue in each *pargana* in the sixteenth and

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[64] Afif, trans. Elliot and Dowson 344.
[65] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 57.

the seventeenth centuries.[66]By the beginning of the fourteenth century, we find increasing reference to the *zamindars*. Amir Khusrau was amongst the first to use it.[67] The word '*zamindar*' was now pressed into a new use, as a blanket term for the entire superior rural class. They tended to form a comprehensive category embracing all kinds of superior right-holders.[68]

III

There are very few and very vague references to the life of the peasants in the histories of the period. The life of the individual peasant is entirely ignored by the chroniclers. However, it is possible to attempt a tentative reconstruction of the condition of the peasantry and the extent of their exploitation by the ruling class from the available information. The chronicles are also silent about the internal organisation of the villages from which it should not be interpreted that they did not exist. According to Moreland, it is better to interpret the silence of the chronicles, not as showing that organised villages did not exist, but as indicating that at this period they did not present any serious administrative problem.[69]

The common peasantry is generally referred to as *raiyat*[70] which meant a herd of whatever animals furnished

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[66] Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi : OUP,2000) 335.
[67] Khusrau, *Khazain* 185.
[68] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 58-59.
[69] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 63.
[70] For eg. See Barani, *Tarikh* 105, 194 ; Afif trans. Elliot and Dowson 289-90.

subsistence, and consequently deserved protection – camels in the desert, cattle in grazing-country, peasants on arable land. Agriculture was carried on by peasants living in villages. The ordinary peasant needed seed, a pair of oxen and some implements to become a cultivator. There was no question of his claiming rights over any parcel of land for the land, in the thirteenth century was abundant.[71] The view that productive land was waiting for men with adequate resources is supported by the efforts of the Sultans to extend and promote cultivation. Firuz Shah brought many waste lands into cultivation which led to an increase in state revenue.[72]

Of the produce of land, a large share went to the state in the form of land-tax and various perquisites. Land tax, called *kharaj*, came into its own with Alauddin Khalji (1296-1316). Until then, except in some localities, the Sultans or their assignees had taken the *kharaj* as a kind of tribute extorted from the chiefs of the defeated regimes. The King's share of the peasant's produce was fixed by Alauddin at one-half; the figure during other reigns is not recorded, but was probably less, rather than more. The peasant could normally put up with a denial of his right over the land he tilled. What he feared was the claim of the superior classes on his crop or even his person. The obligation of the peasant to pay the land tax required that they be

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[71] In the 14th century, the jungles in the middle *Doab* were large enough for peasants to take refuge in during times of trouble. See Barani, *Tarikh* 238. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, land in this tract was almost fully under cultivation. See Irfan Habib, _*Agrarian System*_ 13-15.

[72] Afif, trans. Jauhri 94; trans. Elliot and Dowson 301. Wastelands were called '*Zamin-i amwat*' which literally meant 'dead lands'.

bound to the villages where they had been cultivating the soil.[73]

There was within the peasantry itself, a considerable degree of stratification.[74] There was the peasant cultivator, and the peasant share - cropper. Some segments of the peasantry were subject to various constraints. Ranged against them were the upper stratum of prosperous peasants.[75] Below the peasantry there must have existed a large landless population, composed of the 'menial' castes. But we have no information about them in our sources, and we must assume their existence only on the basis of what we know of later conditions.

The peasants usually paid the land revenue in cash. The fact that Alauddin Khalji ordered that the *khalisa* villages of the *Doab* should pay the tribute in kind,[76] shows that cash payments were common. Barani also tells us that under Alauddin's regulations the peasants were compelled to sell their corn in the fields to the corn carriers at a low price, so that the dealers should have no excuse for neglecting to bring the corn into the markets.[77] A large share of the peasant's produce went to the state in the form of land-tax. Of the remainder, a customary share was fixed for various classes of domestic and other labourers. The peasant and his family kept the rest for their own

[73] See Ain-ul-mulk Mahru's *Insha-i-Mahru*, partial Eng. trans. Shaikh Abdur Rashid (Lahore, 1965) 20-21; also *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 54.
[74] For a definition of the peasant and the criteria for stratification, see Irfan Habib, *Essays* 109-110.
[75] i.e. the *khots* and *muqaddams* who were peasants standing on the borderland of rural aristocracy. The term *raiyat* sometimes stood for the common peasantry and sometimes for the rural revenue payers in general, thus including the headmen and other 'superior' elements. See *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 48.
[76] Barani, *Tarikh* 193.
[77] Barani, *Tarikh* 194.

use, gradually consuming the produce, and making special use of it on the great occasions of domestic life, namely, at birth, marriage and funeral celebrations. A certain proportion went to the share of the priest and the temple, and the rest was consumed by the peasant and his stock of domestic animals.[78]

The King generally dealt with the peasants through the intermediaries who were permitted to collect his share, and to retain a portion or the whole. Direct relations with individual peasants could be established in wide areas only for a short time, for example, under Alauddin Khalji and Sher Shah Sur; but the administrative burden was too heavy to be borne for long. It was expedient to treat the village as a unit and to bargain for its revenue, either with its headmen or with a farmer. The farmer of revenue contracted with the state for the collection of revenue for an extensive area.[79]

Moreland chooses to think that the real master of the peasants' fate was not the King or his Minister, nor the assessor and collector of revenue, but the farmer and the assignee. In earlier stages it could be the Hindu chief paying a lump sum tribute to the *muqti*. Moreland also adds that the tenure of the assignees and farmers was too short and uncertain to justify expenditure of capital or effort on a constructive policy of development. They usually took whatever the peasants could be

[78] K.M. Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of The People of Hindustan* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1970) 123.

[79] However, farming of revenue tended to attract speculators, and the administration suffered through their efforts to make a profit in their short term of office.

made to pay and left the future to look after itself.[80]

Moreland's view cannot be agreed upon entirely. The Delhi Sultans were conscious of their duty to look after the welfare of the peasants and to promote cultivation. The *Taj ul Maasir* records the instructions given by Sultan Iltutmish to Nasirul Haq Wad Din who was appointed governor of Lahore whereby the Sultan enjoined him to "protect the peasants and people of lower ranks from being bitten by the canine teeth of calamities, and from being trampled upon by disasters. By fulfilling their needs by the sun of his kindness and the crescent of compassion make their lives brighter and more cheerful."[81]

Balban's policy towards the peasantry is reflected in his advice to his son Bughra Khan, whom he placed on the throne of Bengal.[82] In his advice to his son, Balban insisted on the danger of making excessive demands of *kharaj* on the peasants even if such demands were justified by precedent. With regard to assessment he advised a middle course (*miyana ravi*) : over assessment would result in the impoverishment of the peasants and the countryside, but under-assessment would make the peasants lazy and insubordinate. Thus he aimed at a peaceful and contented peasantry, raising ample produce and paying a reasonable revenue.[83]

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[80] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 205.

[81] Hassan Nizami, *Taj ul Maasir*, Eng. trans. Bhagwat Saroop (Delhi : Saud Ahmad Dehlavi, 1998) 336.

[82] Balban's instructions *(wasaya)* to his sons had a special significance for medieval governments which were faced with the problem of law and order and the consolidation of political power. See Nizami, *Religion and Politics* 104-109.

[83] Barani, *Tarikh-i Firuz Shahi*, Hindi trans. S.A.A. Rizvi, *History of Early Turkish Rule in India 1206-1290* (Aligarh : AMU, 1956) 194.

It is difficult to believe that the liberal fiscal policies of Ghiyasuddin Tughluq and Firuz Tughluq did not benefit the ordinary peasant. Ghiyasuddin Tughluq, like Balban, believed in the policy of moderation (*rasm-i-miyana ravi*). The consideration of the welfare of the peasant was uppermost in his mind. Instructions were issued to the officers to see that cultivation increased from year to year, and that the government revenue was also proportionately enhanced. The Sultan was conscious of the fact that 'countries are ruined and are kept in poverty by excessive taxation and the exorbitant demand of kings'.[84] He laid down rules of conduct for the governors and officials regarding the realization of the land revenue and took all possible precautions to save the peasant from their high handedness and oppression. He ordered that:

> The revenue should be collected in such a way that the *raiyats* should increase their cultivation; that the lands already in cultivation might be kept so, and some little be added to them every year. So much was not to be exacted at once that the cultivation should fall off and no increase be made in future.[85]

Thus, during Ghiyasuddin's reign, due regard was paid to safeguarding the interests of the peasantry, steps were taken to protect it from rack renting and oppression and to guarantee to it the benefits of extended cultivation.

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[84] Barani, *Tarikh* 230.
[85] Barani, *Tarikh* 230.

The fiscal concessions granted by Firuz Shah made the burden of taxation borne by the peasantry ostensibly lighter. Afif says:

> Some reliable informers have told the author Afif that during the reign of ancient kings this rule was prevalent that if one previous revenue officer (*Amil*) allowed a she-cow with the peasant, the other officer would confiscate it also. Sultan Firoz Shah, throughout his reign, adopted *Shariat* as his guide and took recourse to compassion and mercy and abolished all non-*Sharia* activities. The Sultan lessened even the lawful revenue collection. The Sultan commanded that in the realisation of all the arrear claims of revenue department, two *jitals* be accepted in lieu of a *tanka.* If any revenue Collector realised more than the prescribed tax, he was heavily punished.[86]

The *Futuhat-i Firuz Shahi* mentions the *ghari* and *charai* as the non-*sharia* taxes abolished by Firuz Shah.[87] He also made a unique contribution to agricultural development by constructing five canals which irrigated a large tract of land in the vicinity of Delhi including Hissar. New agricultural settlements sprang up along the banks of these canals.[88] According to Afif 150 wells were sunk at state expense to provide drinking water to travellers and for irrigation. As a result of his measures, cultivation extended and rural prosperity increased. We have it on Afif's testimony that:

> Each and every tract of land, each village and *parganah* of the Kingdom prospered to the extent that every four *kos*, a new village sprang up. The people had so much grain, goods, horses and furniture in their houses that it is not possible to give the details. Each individual had enough cash and wealth. No woman was to be seen without ornaments. The subjects had their residences full of good beddings and fine cots and

[86] Afif, trans. Jauhri 75.
[87] Firuz Shah, *Futuhat-i Firuz Shahi*, Eng. trans. Azra Alavi (Delhi : IAD, 1996) 11.
[88] Afif, trans. Jauhri 93.

> other items of luxury. Each citizen of Delhi and the entire Sultanate led a carefree and worryless life due to mercy and grace of God.[89]

Sher Shah Sur also tried to safeguard the interests of the peasants and protected them from the exploitation of the government officials. He forbade his soldiers from destroying cultivation and gave compensation in money to the cultivators in event of the crops being destroyed. If he entered an enemy's country, he did not enslave or plunder the peasantry of that country nor destroy their cultivation. He used to say, "The cultivators are blameless, they submit to those in power; and if I oppress them they will abandon their villages, and the country will be ruined and deserted, and it will be a long time before it again becomes prosperous."[90]

The abundance of land helped to check relentless exploitation of the peasantry. It set some limit to administrative exactions. That peasants could desert cultivation was well understood by the Delhi Sultans and proved by the *Doab* rebellion which occurred during the reign of Muhammad bin Tughluq.[91] Yet, income from land revenue being the mainstay of medieval times, the state tried its best to appropriate the maximum rural surplus and thus stereotype the life of the average peasant. The tiller of the soil was left with about one-third of his produce. The peasant usually worked hard and

[89] Afif, trans. Jauhri 76.
[90] Abbas Khan Sarwani, *Tarikh-i Sher Shahi* or *Tuhfa-i Akbar Shahi*, Eng. trans. Elliot and Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. IV (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, 1964) 422.
[91] Barani, *Tarikh* 242.

unceasingly almost day and night during certain seasons of the year. His exacting labour was shared by his wife and other members of the family. In return for all this labour he was lucky if he could obtain a square meal every day.[92]

The peasant was left with means of bare subsistence and the gap between the richer classes and the tillers of the soil was quite wide. Alauddin Khalji's stringent land revenue reforms were designed to prevent the burden of the strong falling upon the weak but in any case, a demand of half the produce cannot have left the ordinary peasant with anything more than means of bare subsistence.[93] Alauddin's government protected the 'weak' from the 'strong' only to safeguard and enhance its own share of the producer's surplus. The heaviest burden that the peasant had to bear was land tax, an arbitrary confiscation of such a large part of his produce.[94] When Alauddin fixed fifty percent of the produce as the land revenue, besides collecting other taxes like *jiziyah*, house tax, grazing tax etc., he certainly struck hard at the poor peasants. The peasantry was reduced to utter helplessness because the Sultan had left to them bare sustenance and taken away everything else in *kharaj* and other taxes.[95]

The idea of leaving only the bare minimum to the peasant and collecting the the rest of his hard-earned produce, initiated by Alauddin Khalji in the 14th century, perhaps never

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[92] Ashraf 124.
[93] For the land revenue reforms of Alauddin Khalji, see Kishori Saran Lal, *History of the Khaljis A.D. 1290-1320* (Bombay : Asia, 1967) 177-190.
[94] Irfan Habib, *Essays* 154.
[95] Kishori Saran Lal, "Ideas Leading To The Impoverishment of The Indian Peasantry In Medieval Times" in *Studies in Medieval Indian History* (Delhi : Ranjit, 1966) 190.

left the minds of the rulers of India during medieval times. Writing about Aurangzeb, Tara Chand says, "the policy (of leaving bare subsistence) was suicidal for it killed the goose that laid the golden eggs. It left no incentive for increasing the production or improving the methods of cultivation."[96]

Since agriculture was almost entirely dependent on rainfall and land tax was uniformly high, it was not possible for the peasants to pay their revenue regularly and consequently, the revenue used to fall into arrears. Remissions were seldom granted, the arrears went on accumulating and the kings tried to collect them with utmost rigour.[97] Alauddin's market regulations, and his policy to keep prices 'low' and 'fixed' also affected the peasants adversely. It killed the incentive to production and impoverished the producers :

> It is true that Alauddin reduced the landlords to servitude, but that by itself did not benefit the peasants in any way.... when a husbandman paid half of his hard earned produce in land tax, some portion of the remaining half in other sundry duties, and then was compelled to sell his grain at cheap rates to travelling merchants, who on their part were helped by government officials in obtaining their stocks, it does not speak well of the general condition of the peasantry of those days.[98]

Moreover, the temptation to make profit, "which is the greatest incentive to production", was completely stopped by Alauddin's market regulations and the peasants seemed to have

[96] Tara Chand, *History of Freedom Movement in India*, Vol I (New Delhi : Publications Division, 1992 reprint) 121.
[97] Lal, "Impoverishment of Peasantry" 193.
[98] Lal, *History of the Khaljis* 216.

lived a life of monotony and low standard, if not of squalor.[99] The cultivator was left to live from hand to mouth and had no money to spare for anything but the bare necessities of life. "He was lucky if he and his family could subsist on what was left to them."[100]

In one respect the State actually injured agricultural production instead of promoting it. The frequent march of the troops, as also the tours of the Sultans and royal officials, were recurring curses for the peasantry. In some instances, the soldiers were encouraged to loot the peasants to obtain grain.[101] The compulsory requisitions of the royal entourage left the people without any food for themselves or grass and fodder for their animals.[102] Above all, any measures against the nobles and *iqtadars* ultimately affected the peasants, because any loss to the former was made up by them by realizing a higher share from the peasantry. Shihabuddin Umari, the author of *Masalik-ul-Absar*, states in this connection that, "In case, the *iqta* assigned to the noble does not yield more revenue than assessed by the State, it is in no way less. Its revenue is generally more than the estimated amount."[103] He further adds that, "some of the assignees get more than double of the estimated amount."[104]

[99] Lal, *History of Khaljis* 217.
[100] Sri Ram Sharma, *Studies in Medieval Indian History* (Sholapur : Dayanand College, 1956) 97-98.
[101] Afif, trans. Jauhri 140, 143.
[102] Ashraf 152.
[103] Shihabuddin al-Umari, *Masalik-ul-Absar*, Eng. trans. Iqtidar Hussain Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources of Information on the Life and Conditions of the Sultanate of Delhi* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1992) 118.
[104] Umari 118.

Still, in normal times, the condition of the peasants was fairly stable. "Given reasonably good weather, and a reasonable administration, a village would continue to function; failure of crops or oppressive administration might send the inhabitants elsewhere."[105] A severe famine is reported to have occurred in the wake of the martyrdom of Sidi Maula during Jalaluddin Khalji's reign (1290-1296).[106] In Delhi the price of grain rose to one *jital* per seer.[107] In the Shiwaliks the conditions of famine were particularly acute. Barani writes :

> In the *Siwalik* also the dearth was greatly felt. The Hindus of that country came into Delhi with their families, twenty or thirty of them together, and in the extremity of hunger drowned themselves in the *Jumna*. The Sultan and the nobles did all they could to help them. In the following year such rain fell as but few people could remember.[108]

Evidently the relief measures were insufficient or the famine so severe that the distress of the masses was not alleviated. The famine which occurred in the *Doab* during the time of Muhammad Tughluq was also very severe. It stalked the land for about a decade and reduced the people to a state of utter helplessness. The revenue system was completely dislocated and thousands perished for want of food. The peasantry became

[105] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 64-65.
[106] Sidi Maula was a disciple of *Shaikh* Farid-ud Din Ganj-i-Shakar. He was alleged to have formed a plot to murder the Sultan.
[107] 1 *jital* per *seer* means 40 *jitals* per *man* while in Alauddin's price schedule, wheat was priced at 7.5 *jitals* per *man*.
[108] Barani, *Tarikh* 146.

impoverished and abandoned cultivation.[109]

The pessimistic overtones of Indian philosophy, imbibed by the common man, and the vagaries of nature had turned the peasant into a convinced fatalist reconciled to the worst sufferings of life. Migration or flight was his first natural answer. There was no effort to face the situation or make improvements. Babur's description of a village in Hindustan reveals the political instability as well as the mobility of the people and their poverty. A village comprised small mud huts, and the villagers had only a few movable possessions, which they could carry with them when they moved to another place.[110] Babur's observation about the dress of the peasants in India, reveals their low standard of living. He observed that peasants and people of low standing went about naked. They tied a thing called '*lunguta*', a decency-clout which hung two spans below the navel. Women also tied on a cloth (*lung*), one half of which went round the waist and the other was thrown over the head.[111]

Thus, the peasant could eke out bare subsistence and the State tried to appropriate as much rural surplus as possible. The rural society continued to be unequal, with imperial policies siphoning off a large share of the rural surplus. There was some limited success in the efforts to improve the rural economy even though, the benefit of these was reaped largely by the privileged

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[109] See Ishwari Prasad, *A History of the Qaraunah Turks in India* (Allahabad : Indian Press, 1936) 73-74.

[110] Mohibbul Hasan, *Babur : Founder of the Mughal Empire in India* (New Delhi : Manohar, 1985) 132.

[111] Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, *Baburnama*, Eng. trans. A.S. Beveridge, Vol. I & II (1992; New Delhi : Oriental Reprint, 1970) 519.

sections in rural society. In Amir Khusrau's opinion, "every pearl in the royal crown is but the crystallized drop of blood fallen from the tearful eyes of the poor peasant".[112]

However, if the absence of the conception of welfare state made the peasant live in penury, he had his moments of joy. The vagaries of nature, like famines and droughts brought about a collapse in the peasants' economy as he depended almost entirely on nature, but the timely arrival of rain must have filled his heart with joy. "Cut off from the sophisticated life of the city, his few wants were happily met by the self-sufficient village economy. The village-barber, the cobbler, the horse-shoe maker and the ever-important *Bania* satisfied his little requirements."[113] The joint family system afforded him protection and the village *panchayat* redressed his minor grievances. In addition, the numerous festive occasions which encouraged community dance, *Katha* and dinners must have filled his soul with joy.

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[112] Ashraf 124 n.
[113] Kishori Saran Lal, *Twilight of the Sultanate* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1980) 260.

Chapter 4

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND TECHNOLOGY

It has been hypothesized that there was remarkable progress in science and technology in India before the 12th century A.D., but thereafter 'the creative endeavour showed signs of decay due to the traditional compulsions and political vicissitudes.'[1] However, the intrusion of Islam into Indian history opened the gates a little wider for the admission of techniques received from external sources. Mutual transfer of technology must have taken place between the Islamic world and India where Islam established a vast sub-continental empire.[2] There were accordingly, certain improvements in agricultural tools and methods, which can be ascribed to the medieval centuries.[3] By 1200 A.D. there was a high level of agricultural development so that the Muslim Sultans were unable to contribute substantially any further in regard to the crops sown or the manner in which they were sown or harvested[4]. The Sultans of Delhi, however followed a policy of

[1] Ahsan Jan Qaisar, *The Indian Response to European Technology and Culture A.D.1498-1707* (Delhi : O UP, 1982) 2.
[2] Ahmad Y.al-Hassan and Donald R. Hill, *Islamic Technology: An Illustrated History* (Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 1986) 30.
[3] Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History : Towards a Marxist Perception* (New Delhi : Tulika, 1995) 141.
[4] Hamida Khatoon Naqvi, *Agricultural, Industrial and Urban Dynamism Under the Sultans of Delhi* (New_Delhi : Munshiram, 1986) 12.

extension of cultivation[5] and bringing about improvement in the cropping pattern.[6]

The heart of the kingdom of the Delhi Sultans lay in the landlocked Indus and upper Gangetic plain where as ever agriculture was the paramount productive activity.[7] Leaving aside those who were engaged in domestic labour and crafts, all others took to cultivation on land[8]. The geo-physical attributes of the empirical dominion were immensely helpful in the development of agriculture . Babur writes in the *Baburnama* that the greater part of the Hindustan country is situated on level land.[9] The bulk of the terrain is composed of alluvial soil.[10] There are certain exceptions such as the sharply rising and straight Shiwalik hills in the north, or the scattered and broken Aravalli outliers in the south west of Delhi.[11] The Indus basin consists of alluvial silt deposited by river Sind and its tributaries. Ibn Battuta describes it as 'This is one of the largest riverbeds of the world. It overflows in summer; and the people of the Punjab cultivate the soil after its overflow'.[12] The entire area has three seasons: winter with a

[5] Ziauddin Barani, '*Tarikh-i-Firozshahi*' Eng trans. Elliot and Dowson, Vol. III (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, n.d.) 105.
[6] W.H.Moreland, *The Agrarian System of Moslem India* (1929; NewDelhi : Atlantic, 1994) 50, 51, 59.
[7] Naqvi 11.
[8] K.M Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1970) 117.
[9] Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, *Baburnama* Eng trans. A.S Beveridge, Vol. I & II (1922; New Delhi : Oriental Reprint, 1970) 486.
[10] Alberuni Kitab-ul-Hind, ed., E.C.Sachau and trans. by him as *Alberuni's India*, Vol. I (1910; London; Delhi, 1964 reprint) 259.
[11] O.H.K.Spate, *India and Pakistan: A General and Regional Geography* (London : Methuen & Co.,1954; 1963 reprint) 485; Baburnama 485-6.
[12] Ibn Batuta, *Rehla*, Eng trans. by Mahdi Husain (Baroda : Oriental Institute, 1953) 2.

mean ranging from 55-64 ° F, summer from 90-95 °F with extremes of 115°or more[13] and the rainy season. The Hindus had, however, classified the year into six seasons.[14] In the Indo-Gangetic divide, except for the submontane regions, the rainfall is very scanty and has to be supplemented with artificial irrigation.[15]

The high fertility of Indian soil has been a feature of its agriculture through the ages. Amir Khusrau also speaks of the fertility and fruitfulness of Indian soil and the temperate nature of its climate.[16] Different sources refer to the cultivation of two or three crops in a year in the same field. Megasthenes' (302-298 B.C.) account mentions the cultivation of two crops in a year.[17] The *Arthasastra* refers to wet crops (*kedara*), winter crops (*haimana*) and summer crops (*graishmika*).[18] Ibn Battuta, in the early fourteenth century A.D., says that the soil was so fertile as to produce two crops every year- autumn crops and spring crops.[19] The revenue rates of Akbar's reign are mentioned for two crops- spring and autumn.[20] There was, of course, considerable regional variation. Abul Fazl mentions that the Delhi *suba* yeilded three crops a year, while other regions like

[13] Spate 500.
[14] *Baburnama* 515.
[15] Spate 485.
[16] Yusuf Husain, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture* (Bombay : Asia, 1959) 122.
[17] Pushpa Niyogi, *Contributions to the Economic History of Northern India* (Calcutta : Progressive, 1962) 20.
[18] Kautilya , *Arthasastra*, Eng trans. R.Shamasastry,9th ed. (Mysore : Padam, 1988) 131-32.
[19] Battuta 18.
[20] Abul-Fazl Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Eng trans.H.S.Jarrett, 2nd ed., Vol. III (Delhi : New Taj Office, 1989) 76-122.

Ajmer were not so fertile and yielded one crop or an insignificant second.[21]

The cultivation of two or three crops a year implies the absence of fallowing in Indian agriculture. Works dealing with agricultural practices do not mention the genuine fallow which shows that it hardly existed.[22] The *Arthasastra*, which discusses agricultural operations in detail, makes no reference to the practice of the fallow.[23] Historians, while using the term 'fallow' have referred to virgin or deserted lands[24] or to the lea i.e. land withdrawn from cultivation temporarily to enable it to recover its lost fertility. William Tennant, writing at the end of the eighteenth century, noted that '...the Indian allows it (the land) a lea, but never a fallow.'[25] Among the four categories of land mentioned in the *Ain-i Akbari*, *Parauti* is the land which is left out of cultivation for a time so that it may recover its strength.[26]

The renewal of soil fertility took place as a result of the annual silt deposited by the rivers in the plains. The Indus and the Ganga have been estimated to carry some 900,000 and 1,000,000 tons of suspended matter daily, although there is a much larger area of fine silt in the Ganga basin.[27] Besides this,

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[21] Abul-Fazl, *Ain II* 273,283

[22] Even modern historians while discussing agricultural operations do not refer to the fallow e.g. B.N.S.Yadava, *Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century* (Allahabad : Central Book Depot, 1973) 256-62.

[23] *Arthasastra* 129-133.

[24] Niyogi 1.

[25] W. Tennant, *Indian Recreations: Consisting of strictures on the Domestic and Rural Economy of the Mahomedans and Hindoos*, Vol. II (Edinburg, 1804) 6.

[26] Abul-Fazl, *Ain II* 68.

[27] O.H.K.Spate & A.T.A. Learmonth, *India and Pakistan A General and Regional Geography*, 3rd revised ed. (London : Methuen &Co., 1967) 43.

manuring was used to restore the fertility of the fields. The Indian farmers made full use of manures and fertilizers: for the former, they gathered animal dung and let it dry for ten months, while for the latter, they made use of liquid manure and various animal and vegetable products.[28] The early medieval texts such as the *Brahatsamhita*, the *Agni Purana* and the *Krsi- Parasara* provide evidence about the advanced knowledge of fertilizers.[29] The *Arthasastra* recommends the use of a mixture of honey, clarified butter, the fat of hogs and cow-dung for plastering the cut end of the seeds of sugarcane and the like.[30] Cotton seeds were to be treated with cow-dung and the trees were to be manured with the bones and dung of cows. The sprouts of seeds were to be manured with a fresh haul of minute fish and irrigated with the milk of *snuhi* (Euphorbia Antiquorum).[31] The medieval agronomist advocated the bean seeds to be moistened for 24 hours before the actual sowing, the use of lukewarm water for moistening gram seeds, while the seeds of lentils and vetches were to be mixed with cow-dung for faster growth and higher yield.[32]

The use of animal manure in the form of animal droppings must have helped to restore the fertility of the fields. In India, cattle were innumerable and sold at low prices.[33] In the

[28] Jeannine Auboyer, *Daily Life in Ancient India* (London : Asia, 1967) 64.
[29] R.S.Sharma , *Material Culture and Social Formations in Ancient India* (Madras : Macmillan, 1992 reprint) 15.
[30] *Arthasastra* 132.
[31] *Arthasastra* 132.
[32] Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 15-16. See also Yadava 257.
[33] Shihabuddin al Umari, *Masalik-ul-Absar*, Eng trans. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources of Information on the Life and Conditions of the Sultanate of Delhi* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1992) 133.

two villages where Firuz Shah established the city of Hisar Firozah, Afif says that one of them had fifty *kharaks* (cattle pens) and the other had forty.[34] The large area of wasteland, including fallow, and forest, meant that there was little shortage of pasturage for cattle. The *Arthasastra* enjoins the king to make provision for pasture grounds on uncultivable tracts and also refers to the office of the superintendent of pasture lands.[35] Moreland also observed that, 'In most parts of the country, though not everywhere, there was more wasteland available for grazing, and it is reasonable to infer that cattle would be obtained more cheaply and easily than is now possible.'[36]

For actual cultivation the tiller required simple equipment of a plough and a pair of oxen. The use of the plough was discovered in the Indus culture at Kalibangan[37] which explains the really large extent of Indus agriculture, covering the north-western plains and extending into Gujarat.[38] During the *Rig Vedic* period, the use of the ox-drawn plough (*sira*) continued.[39] In the late *Vedic* and *Brahmana* literature, there is reference to ploughs drawn by six, eight or even twelve oxen.[40] Iron begins to be mentioned in the late *Vedic* texts. Earlier, wooden ploughshare was used, but now the coulter was made of iron

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[34] Shams-i Siraj Afif, *Tarikh-i- Firozshahi*, Eng trans. R.C. Jauhri, *Medieval India in Transition – Tarikh-i- FirozShahi A First Hand Account* (New Delhi : Sundeep, 2001) 91.

[35] *Arthasatra* 48, 160-61.

[36] W.H. Moreland *India at the Death of Akbar: An Economic Study* (New Delhi : Low Price, 1990 reprint) 106.

[37] Furrows of a ploughed field were discovered here belonging to the first half of the 3rd millenium B.C.

[38] Irfan Habib, *Essays* 112.

[39] S.K. Das, *Economic History of Ancient India* (Calcutta : University, 1925) 28, 29.

[40] Das 90-91.

which helped in the tillage of comparatively harder soil.[41] The first recorded reference to the plough containing the 'ironpoint' is apparently in the *Manusmriti*.[42] The plough was termed *takht-i-istarash* in the Persian lexicon, *hal* in the local dialect and was a horizontal beam structure.[43] William Tennant, however, observed that the Indian plough merely scratched the soil resembling the digging of a mole, rather than dig deep into it.[44] It was therefore, light and simple. This was primarily due to the fact that the fertility of most soils in India lies at the surface.[45] Thus, any deep ploughing would not have been necessary. Perhaps a smaller quantity of iron was used in the medieval plough. The high cost of iron and the lack of resources on the part of the peasantry was also a reason for 'the economy of iron in agricultural implements in India.'[46] One non-Mughal painting exhibits the iron coulter prominently,[47] while the existence of the iron share and coulter, though very important, was taken for granted by the Mughal artists who did not project it clearly.[48] There were, of course, regional variations in the size and weight of ploughs. In Punjab, Baden-Powell recorded two different sets of ploughs: the heavier *munna* and the lighter *hal*, each drawn by

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[41] R.S. Sharma, "Class Formation and it's Material Basis in the Upper Gangetic Basin", *Indian Historical Review* II 1 (1975) : 1-13.

[42] Manu, *Manava Dharamsastra*, Eng trans. G. Buhler, *The Laws of Manu*, Sacred Books of the East, Vol. XXV (1886; Delhi : Motilal, 1964) X, 84, 420-21.

[43] Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 17.

[44] Tennant, Vol. II 77-78.

[45] Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi : OUP, 2000) 24-26.

[46] Moreland, *India at the Death of Akbar* 106.

[47] It occurs in a Persian glossary dated c.1469.

[48] A.Jan Qaisar," Agricultural Technology Depicted in Mughal Paintings", *Itinerario* Vol. XVI No.2 (1992) : 61.

different species of oxen.[49] Abul Fazl implies that a peasant having four oxen for his plough was too poor to be taxed.[50]

The method of tilling was as follows:

> Tillage was performed by harnessing a pair of oxen to the plough with three basic things: a long wooden beam or shaft attached to the plough was fastened to the middle of the yoke placed over the depression between the neck and the hump of the animals; and two ropes, one for each ox, the one end of which passed through the nostrils of the oxen while the other end was held in the hands of the tiller.[51]

The plough had a metal-pointed downward projection known as ploughshare, which made deep line of furrows in the ground as it was pulled along by the yoked bullocks.[52] The ploughman weighted the ploughshare by perching on top of it while gripping the plough-handle with one hand; with his other hand he urged the oxen forward with a whip.[53] William Terry, an English traveller called the Indian plough as 'foot plough'.[54]

In order to clear the land of stones and weeds two or four pronged metal projections described as tongs, *phalis* in the vernacular, were used to collect them together. In case of thorny weeds, sickle was more effective.[55] Levelling of the soil was done, by breaking the clods or lumps of earth. This was done with the help of wooden boards called *patela* in some parts of the Hindi-speaking belt.[56] The levelling and cleaning processes for

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[49] Baden H. Powell, *Handbook of the Manufactures and Arts of the Punjab*, Vol. II (Lahore : Punjab Printing Press, 1872) 314.
[50] Abul Fazl, *Ain* II 49.
[51] Qaisar, "Agricultural Technology" 63-65.
[52] Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 17.
[53] Auboyer 64.
[54] William Terry's account in William Foster, ed., *Early Travels in India* (New Delhi : S.Chand, 1968 reprint) 298.
[55] Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 14.
[56] Qaisar, "Agricultural Technology" 65.

some crops like cane or wheat were elaborate and time consuming, while those for barley were much simpler.[57]

Seeds were sown in a variety of ways. The simplest method was broadcasting the seeds.[58] It is depicted in a *Baburnama* illustration where a man is scattering seeds in a garden, which he takes out from the improvised cloth-bag slung over his shoulder.[59] Seeds were also sown with the help of the seed drill. Seed drills were used in India and China centuries before Europeans did so.[60] The pre-historic Sumer civilization is credited with a tube attachment to the plough through which seed was dropped.[61] The seed drill was known in medieval India. Duarte Barbosa, in the early sixteenth century, writes about a place near Bhatkal on the western coast that:

> ...they plough the land as we do with oxen and buffaloes yoked in pairs, and the ploughshare has a hollow in it wherein the rice is carried when the land is flooded, and as the share ploughs the rice goes on setting down under water and earth. On dry land they sow by hand.[62]

Another agricultural practice was that of dibbling, that is, the dropping of seeds into holes driven into the ground by sticks. This method has been noted in regard to cotton cultivation in an early seventeenth century tract on agriculture.[63] The dibbler is a

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[57] Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 14-15.

[58] G.B. Tremenheere, *Report on the Present State of Agriculture in the Punjab* (Lahore, 1853) 197.

[59] Qaisar, *Agricultural Technology* 66-67.

[60] J.Needham, *Science and Civilization in China* VI, part 2 (Cambridge, 1986 reprint) 251-276.

[61] M.S.Randhawa, *A History of Agriculture in India*, Vol. I (New Delhi : Indian Council of Agricultural Research, 1981) 114.

[62] Duarte Barbosa, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, Eng trans. Longworth Dames, Vol. I (London : Hakluyt, 1967 reprint) 192.

[63] Irfan Habib, "The Technology and Economy of Mughal India", *Indian Economic and Social History Review* Vol. XVII No.1 (1980) : 3.

three feet long hollow wooden, bamboo or metal rod with tapering knobs at the bottom, now known as *veer* in the vernacular.[64]

The most important technological advance was registered in the field of irrigation. It was provided by the state, the community and even by individual peasant initiatives. From *Vedic* times, and perhaps earlier, Indians had learnt to sink wells in order to reach deep-flowing waters, to deflect the course of rivers so that they might supply canals, and to regulate the flow of these waters.[65] The *Arthasastra* also refers to methods of raising water from rivers, lakes, tanks and wells.[66] In early India, several imperial and provincial dynasties undertook the construction and maintenance of reservoirs or canals for irrigation in various regions like Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, in Eastern Deccan, Kashmir and in the Kaveri Delta.[67]

The supply of water for irrigation, drinking, domestic and industrial purposes has always been a vital consideration in Islamic lands.[68] Under the Delhi Sultanate, Ghiyasuddin Tughluq was the first Sultan who thought of opening canals and probably did some minor work on a very small scale.[69] Muhammad Tughluq advanced sums of money to the people for digging wells

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[64] Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 16.
[65] Auboyer 63.
[66] *Arthasastra* 131.
[67] Nand Kishore Kumar," Hydraulic Agriculture in Peninsular India (c.300B.C. to A.D.1300)", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 40th (Waltair) Session (1979) : 211-14.
[68] Hassan and Hill 37.
[69] R.P.Tripathi *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration* (Allahabad : Central Book Depot, 1992 reprint) 286.

in order to extend cultivation.[70] Ibn Battuta has described an unbricked well and how he drew water from it.[71] Masonry wells also existed but brickless wells were presumably more abundant. In some localities water blocked up by throwing dams (*bands*) upon streams provided another source of irrigation.[72]

The most important contribution to the construction of canals and irrigation works was made by Firuz Tughluq. Under him was created the biggest Indian medieval network of canals. He himself writes in the *Futuhat-i- Firuzshahi*, "All are agreed that building canals, planting trees, creating land endowments for the welfare of the public, are meritorious acts under the *sharia*."[73] Afif mentions that Firuz Shah excavated two canals, the Rajab-wah and the Ulugh-khani to supply water to his new city of Hisar Firozah. Rajab-wah was cut from river Jamuna, Ulugh-khani from Sutlej; both were conducted through the vicinity of Karnal. After a length of about eighty *kos*, they discharged their waters by one channel into the town.[74] Firuzabad canal started from the vicinity of Mandali and Sirmoor hills and uniting with seven other canals led to Hansi and terminated at Hisar Firozah.[75] Another canal was dug out from the Ghaggar, passed through the fort of Sarsuti and was taken to Harni Khera. Another canal was excavated from river Budhi and flowed to

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[70] Battuta 88.
[71] Battuta 156-7.
[72] Tapan Ray Chaudhary and Irfan Habib, eds.,*The Cambridge Economic History of India 1200-1750*, Vol. I (Hyderabad : Orient,1984) 49.
[73] Firuz Shah, *Futuhat-i-Firuzshahi*, Eng trans. Azra Alavi (Delhi : IAD,1996) 28.
[74] Afif, trans. Jauhri 92.
[75]Yahya bin Ahmad Sihrindi, *Tarikh-i-MubarakShahi*, Eng trans. K.K.Basu (Baroda : Baroda Oriental Institute : 1932) 130-31.

Firozabad.[76] Besides these there were many more small and big canals. Some canals in the Multan region, are said to have been dug and maintained by the local population. Mahru, the governor of Multan, writes in one of his letters that, for certain types of canals, expenses could be levied from the people if the *Bait-ul-mal* was not in a position to bear the expenses. Any deviation from this practice would adversely affect cultivation and the people at large.[77] This letter shows the state policy regarding irrigation by canals. The remains of Firuz Shah's canals were traced by British engineers in the nineteenth century. The modern Western Jamuna canal is the improved restoration of his original canal.[78] This canal which had become choked up, was repaired by Akbar.[79] In Shah Jahan's time, it was reopened from its mouth at Khizrabad and extended upto Delhi. It was known as the *Nahr-i-Bihisht*(Channel of Heaven).[80]

Besides canals, Firuz Shah paid attention to other irrigation works also. According to Ferishta, he constructed 150 wells, 50 dams and 40 reservoirs.[81] His interest in irrigational schemes is evident from Afif's statement that during the rainy season, he appointed special officers to examine the banks of all the water-courses and was exceedingly pleased when he heard of

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[76] Sihrindi 130-31.

[77] Ainuddin Abdullah bin Mahru, *Insha-i-Mahru*, partial Eng trans. Shaikh Abdur Rashid (Lahore, 1965) 42-43.

[78] R.C.Jauhri, *Firoz Tughlaq 1351-1388 A.D.*, 2nd ed. (Jalandhar : ABS, 1990) 105.

[79] Satish Chandra, *Medieval India From Sultanat To The Mughals*, Part One (New Delhi : Har Anand, 1997) 123.

[80] S.A.A. Rizvi, *The Wonder That Was India*, Part II (Calcutta : Rupa, 1993 reprint) 206.

[81] Mohammad Qasim Ferishta, *Tarikh-i-Ferishta*, Eng trans. J.Briggs, *History of the Rise of the Mahomedan Power in India,* Vol. I (Calcutta : Cambray, 1966) 465.

widespread inundation.[82] The supply channels to the *Hauz-i-Shamsi*[83] had been obstructed by some dishonest people. Firuz Shah punished them and had the supply channels reopened."The *Hauz-i-Shamsi* became like a river of sweet water on account of abundance of water".[84] Firuz also had the *Hauz-i-Alai* (tank built by Alauddin Khalji near Delhi) dug out again, the water channel to which had been choked.[85] The irrigation scheme proved beneficial to the people.

The canals of Firuz Tughlaq were of a somewhat elementary type, but their value to the country cannot be questioned.[86] Hisar was so well irrigated by the new canals that both autumn (*kharif*) and spring (*rabi*) crops could be grown while previously, spring crops like wheat could not be grown due to scarcity of water.[87] The king's revenue also increased by about two lakhs of *tankas*. This was due to the irrigation tax (*haqq-i-sharb*) amounting to about one-tenth of the produce which was levied from areas irrigated by the canals constructed by the state.[88] Barani also implies that these canals would go a long way towards creating conditions favourable for socio-economic growth in the areas through which they flowed.[89] Vast areas were brought under cultivation due to the introduction of irrigation facilities. Afif writes about the cities of Fathabad and Hisar

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[82] Afif, trans. Jauhri 94.
[83] Tank built by Iltutmish south of Qutb Minar.
[84] *Futuhat-i-Firuzshahi* 29.
[85] *Futuhat-i-Firuzshahi* 29.
[86] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 60.
[87] Afif, trans. Jauhri 92.
[88] It was a part of the personal income of the Sultan
[89] Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources of Information on the Life and Conditions of the Sultanate of Delhi* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1992) 160.

Firozah that:

> For these two cities, canals were dug and covered the distance of eighty or ninety *kos* in the region. Between these canals, several towns and villages were located. For example town of Jind, town of Dhatrath, city of Hansi, Tughluqpur alias Safdon. Each town and village immensely benefitted from the water made available through these canals.[90]

The opening of canals also helped in fighting famines. "If the Delhi Sultanate had remained in health and vigour after Firuz, a permanent famine policy would have been definitely established."[91]

The peasants used various means to raise water from wells. The simplest device was the *dhenkli*. It consisted of a long rope lashed to the fork of an upright beam or trunk of a tree to put it in a swinging position. The bucket was fastened to a rope whose other end was tied to one end of the swinging pole hovering over the well. The pole's other end carried a counterweight, a little heavier than the bucket when filled with water. This contraption could be operated by pulling the rope down into the well and releasing it. The counterweight then brought the bucket up which was upturned to let the water flow into a channel.[92] This device was known as *shaduf* in Egypt[93]. It was considered semi-mechanical by R.J.Forbes as it worked on the First Class Lever Principle[94] It required no heavy investment either of capital or labour but could be used only in shallow

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[90]Afif, trans. Jauhri 93.
[91] Tripathi 289.
[92] See Qaisar, "Agricultural Technology" 73.
[93] Hassan and Hill 37.
[94] R.J.Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology*, Vol. II (Leiden : Brill, 1956) 38.

water.

Another device was the *charasa* in which a pair of bullocks were harnessed to draw water. Babur gives a description of its main mechanism:

> In Agra, Chandwar, Biana and those parts, again, people water with a bucket; this is a laborious and filthy way. At the well-edge they set up a fork of wood, having a roller adjusted between the forks, tie a rope to a large bucket,put the rope over the roller, and tie its other end to the bullock. One person must drive the bullock, another empty the basket. Every time the bullock turns after having drawn the bucket out of the well, that rope lies on the bullock-track, in pollution of urine and dung, before it descends again into the well.[95]

This technique was more capital and labour intensive than the *dhenkli* as it required one or two bullocks and two men. It could operate in deeper wells and irrigate comparatively larger areas. Babur adds that for some crops, men and women carry water by repeated efforts in pitchers.[96]

The most significant contribution to the field of irrigation was the development of waterwheels. This development took place in three stages in Northern and North Western India. The ancient Indian *noria*, the *araghatta*, used to carry a string of pots fixed close to its rim. In the second stage, it was given the rope-chain enabling it to reach water at some depth *(ghatiyantra).* Finally, it was equipped with pin-drum gearing, which made it possible for it to be worked by animal power (*saqiya* or Persian wheel).[97]

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[95] Babur 487.
[96] Babur 487.
[97] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 49.

The earliest water-lifting wheel in India was the *noria* or *araghatta*. Its classic description occurs in the Samanta-*pasadika* (a commentary on the *Vinayapitaka*) where the *araghatta* is described as a well wheel with water-pots attached to its spokes. Almost all quotations occuring in Sanskrit and Prakrit literature regarding continuous water-flow from the earthen jars of the wheel are consistent with the *noria*.[98] It was worked by manpower only. It was a water driven machine most suitable in areas where there were fast flowing streams whose courses were some distance below the surrounding fields.[99]

In the second stage, the earthen pots were transferred from the rim of the wheel to the garland or chain to exploit it over wells. A chain or garland (*mala*) of pots was provided which was long enough to reach the water level of the well. *Harsha-charita* compares the pot-garland (*mala*) of the wheel to the rosary.[100] The chain was made of double ropes without open ends between which the pots were secured with timber strips. When the wheel was operated by manpower, the pot-garland, too, revolved along with the wheel. This enabled the pots to take water while going down and to discharge at the moment when they came up and turned once again to go down.[101] This second stage of *noria* was called *ghatiyantra* in Sanskrit.[102]

The Persian wheel (*saqiya*) was introduced in India

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[98] Irfan Habib, "Changes in Technology in Medieval India", *Studies in History* Vol. II No.1 (1980) : 19.
[99] Hassan and Hill 40.
[100] Irfan Habib, "Changes in Technology" 19.
[101] Qaisar, "Agricultural Technology" 75.
[102] The words *araghatta* and *arahatta* continued to be used for both the types of *noria*.

around the time of the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in Northern India. Irfan Habib was the first scholar to suggest that the Persian wheel, with its use of the animal power and the gearing mechanism, was a foreign importation.[103] He also pointed out that the principal difference between the *noria* and the Persian wheel is that the *noria* can operate only on an open surface (stream or reservoir) whereas the Persian wheel can also raise water from deep wells which is made possible by the chain. Moreover, the gearing mechanism enables animal-power to be employed and the speed with which the chain moves can be properly controlled.[104] With gears, we enter upon a very advanced stage in the technological sense.

Babur gives a classic description of the Persian wheel:

> In Lahor, Dipalpur and those parts, people water by means of a wheel. They make two circles of ropes long enough to suit the depth of the well, fix strips of wood between them, and on these fasten pitchers, The ropes with the wood and attached pitchers are put over the well-wheel. At one end of the wheel-axle a second wheel is fixed, and close to it another on an upright axle. This last wheel the bullock turns; its teeth catch in the teeth of the second, and thus the wheel with the pitchers is turned. A trough is set where the water empties from the pitchers and from this the water is conveyed everywhere.[105]

Thus there were three wheels now. The lantern-wheel which was set up on an upright axle and moved by animal power round-and-round horizontally. This wheel was provided with vertical pegs at regular intervals. The second wheel, pin-wheel

[103] Irfan Habib," Technological Changes and Society: 13th and 14th Centuries", Presidential Address, Section II, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* Varanasi (1969): 152-53.
[104] Irfan Habib, "Technological Changes and Society" 150.
[105] Babur 486.

was arranged vertically with a shaft or an axle. The axle was connected with the third wheel over the well that carried the pot-garland. The animals turned the lantern-wheel whose pegs got enmeshed with the teeth or cogs carried on the pin-wheel. This acted as gear system making the pin-wheel revolve vertically and the vertical motion was transmitted through its axle to the water-wheel with pot-garland over the well.[106]

Shihabuddin-al-Umari, while giving a description of Delhi refers to the Persian wheel. He says, "In the city the water is supplied from the wells which are not dug very deep, no deeper than seven cubits. The wells are usually found with Persian wheels."[107]

The Persian wheel was introduced in India from West Asia. The *saqiya* was known in Roman times, from about the start of the Christian era. It was in use in Egypt, Syria and probably along the North African coast. It was almost certainly in use in Arabia before the advent of Islam.[108] It was also present in modern Persia.[109] In India, it had become the peasant's principal means of water-lift in the Indus and trans-Jamuna regions by the sixteenth century. It remained confined to these limits until the latter part of the nineteenth century, when with the coming of the metallic Persian wheel, it spread to many other parts of the country.[110] Abul Fazl writes that the Punjab was

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[106] Qaisar, " Agricultural Technology" 75-77.
[107] Umari 116.
[108] Hassan and Hill 40.
[109] A.K.S.Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* (London : OUP, 1953) 228.
[110]Irfan Habib, "Technology and Economy of Mughal India" 3-4.

unrivalled in terms of agricultural fertility and irrigation was chiefly from wells.[111] Thus, any improvement in the mechanism of raising water from wells, like the Persian wheel, would have contributed greatly to the extension of agriculture in the Punjab.[112]

In medieval India, great expansion of agriculture took place. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, large tracts of the Gangetic plains were covered by dense forests but by the end of the sixteenth century, majority of this tract had been brought under the plough.[113] The *Arthasastra* mentions 17 kinds of crops to be sown in different seasons.[114] By the twelfth century A.D. 24 to25 kinds of food crops, including fruits and vegetables, were being cultivated.[115] According to the *Sunya Purana*, a medieval text, more than 50 varieties of rice were grown in Bengal.[116] Abul Fazl, writing in the sixteenth century, says that if a single grain of each kind of rice were collected, they would fill a large vase.[117]

A large number of crops were cultivated by the peasants of the Delhi Sultanate. Pulses, wheat, barley, millet, peas, rice, sesame, and oilseeds, sugarcane and cotton were the chief crops.[118] Potato, maize, red chillies and tobacco were introduced during the sixteenth century.[119] Ibn Battuta, who

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[111] Abul Fazl, *Ain* II 316.
[112] Irfan Habib,"Technological Changes and Society" 153.
[113] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 48.
[114] *Arthasastra* 131.
[115] Niyogi 23-24.
[116] Yadava 258.
[117] Abul Fazl, *Ain* II 134.
[118] Ashraf 118.
[119] Satish Chandra, *Medieval India From Sultanat to the Mughals*, Part One 145.

travelled all over India has given an exhaustive list of the foodgrains and various other crops, fruits and flowers produced in the country. He writes that the soil was so fertile as to produce two crops every year. There were seven varieties of autumn crops (including millet, peas and beans of different kinds), which were sown in summer when the rains fell and reaped sixty days after sowing. There were four varieties of spring crops (wheat, barley, chick-peas and lentils) which were sown in the same soil in which the autumn grains had been sown.[120] Shihabuddin-al-Umari mentions different kinds of foodgrains such as wheat, rice, barley, gram, lentils, *mash* (*urd*), lobiya, sesame and peas.[121]

Ibn Battuta mentions that wheat was abundant at Dhar in Malwa. The city of Marh (near Gwalior) produced an excellent quality of wheat which was matched only by that of China. Its grains were long, deep, yellow and thick.[122] In ancient India three types of rice were grown, white, black and the so-called 'rapid' which ripened in two months.[123] Under the Delhi Sultanate, twenty-one varieties of rice were known.[124] It was one of their principal cereals and was sown three times a year.[125] The city of Sarsuti produced an abundance of fine rice which was exported to the capital, Delhi.[126] It was also grown around Multan.[127]

[120] Battuta 18-19.
[121] Umari 114.
[122] Battuta 161, 167.
[123] Auboyer 65.
[124] Umari 115.
[125] Battuta 19.
[126] Battuta 23. Sarsuti was modern Sirsa.
[127] Umari 114.

Millet was found in abundance and was the staple food of the devout, abstainers and the poor as it sprang up without being cultivated. Two kinds of peas were known, *mash* and *mung*. *Mung* was a kind of *mash* but its seed was long and it was bright green in colour. It was eaten for breakfast when cooked with rice along with ghee.[128] Sugarcane was known in India from where it spread to neighbouring countries.[129] Umari also writes:

> The sugarcane abounds everywhere in India. Among its varieties one is of black colour with hard covering (shell) but it is excellent for chewing. This variety of sugarcane is not found in any other country. From other varieties sugar is prepared in large quantities and it is cheaper than candy. It is not crystallised and rather resembles white flour.[130]

Sesame and sugarcane were cultivated along with the autumn crops. Sugar was found in abundance at Kara and Manikpur.[131] After the sugarcane crop was harvested it was kept in storage until it was required for processing, when it was pressed in a special machine to extract the sugar. The same method was used with sesame to produce a widely used edible oil.[132] The introduction of canals by Firuz Tughlaq added the culture of wheat and sugarcane to the existing cultivation of sesame and pulses in the area around Hissar and Firuzabad.[133] *Moth* was given as fodder to animals along with chick-peas since barley was not considered strengthening for the animals.[134]

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[128] Battuta 18-19.
[129] Hassan and Hill 220.
[130] Umari 115.
[131] Battuta 19,40.
[132] Auboyer 65.
[133] Ashraf 118.
[134] Battuta 19.

There were two varieties of cotton. *Sembhal* (gosaypium aberasum), a perennial tree of wild growth, yielded cotton suitable for wadding and quilting of beddings.[135] The other was the herbaceous cotton (gossypium herbaceous), which produced material not only for padding but also for weaving cloths. It was known as Indian Cotton and became quite an important part of Oriental commerce.[136] William Terry, the English traveller reports that the cotton seeds, after sowing, grow into shrubs producing first a yellow blossom and then into small pods containing a moist yellowish substance. As it ripens, it swells bigger till it breaks the covering becoming white as snow in a short time, and then they gather it. Once sown the shrubs bear for three or four years.[137]

Another important cash crop was indigo (indigofera tinctoria). It came to be identified with India for its origin. Both black and blue colours were produced by the Indian indigo.[138] It was a small plant, not above a yard high. Its seeds were contained in a small round pod about an inch long. It was sown once in three years. The yield of the second year was the best being very light and of a perfect violet colour.[139] Indigo flourished in areas of brackish water and dense soil. It was grown around Canova and Biana.[140] Two crops whose

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[135] Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 28.
[136] E.H.Warmington, *The Commerce Between The Roman Empire and India*, 2nd ed. (Delhi : Vikas, 1974) 210-11.
[137] Terry, Foster 301.
[138] Warmington 204-5.
[139] William Finch in William Foster ed., *Early Travels in India* (New Delhi : S. Chand,1968 reprint) 153.
[140] Finch, Foster 151.

introduction might be attributed to the Islamic era were opium and a non-regular crop of *tarams baqli* (the Egyptian beans or the *Shami* beans), though the date and place of introduction are not known.[141]

Barbosa noticed in the early part of the sixteenth century that wheat, millet, gingelly, peas and beans were grown abundantly and cheaply in the kingdom of Gujarat. In the Deccan, there were many beautiful villages with well-tilled lands as well as other villages with gardens for the cultivation of betel-leaf.[142] In South India, Malabar was known for its spices. Ibn Battuta gives an account of the pepper in Malabar. He noticed that the natives planted the pepper-bushes opposite the coconut trees around which they climbed like vines; but they had no tendrils as in the case of vines.[143] He also noticed the cultivation of areca-nuts and betel-nuts. Areca-nuts were found in abundance at Budfattan, one of the oldest harbours of Malabar, from where they were exported to China.[144] The flourishing condition of agriculture in the Vijayanagara kingdom is mentioned by foreign writers. According to Domingos Paes (1520-1522) the land had plenty of rice and Indian-corn, grains, beans and an infinity of cotton. The quantity of grains was very large because they were used as food for men and horses. Oilseeds and good quality wheat were also found. The dominions

[141] Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 26.
[142] Barbosa, I 154-55, 166, 168.
[143] Battuta 183-84.
[144] Battuta 187-88.

were very well cultivated and very fertile.[145]

Crops were harvested with the aid of sickles, hooks and scythes. The sickle has been referred to in the late portions of the *Rig Veda* and also in the *Atharva Veda*. The later *Vedic* texts use the term *lavitra* either for the reaping hook or for reaping the crops.[146] The true spade and a few sickle blades have been recovered from Taxila.[147] After cutting, the stalks were tied in sheaves and laid out in the sun to dry. When dried, the grain was thrashed, sifted and winnowed through the winnowing basket.[148] One Mughal painting shows one man cutting the crop with a semi-circular sickle; another making bundles of the harvested crop; a third driving a single bullock upon a threshing floor and the fourth is shown winnowing the threshed out material.[149] The stock of grain was stored usually in grain-pits or *khattees,* which preserved the grain for a very long time. In these pits the sides and bottom were lined with wheat or barley stubble, the grain was covered with straw and the opening of the pit was sealed off with a coating of clay and cow-dung to resist the monsoon.[150] Ibn Battuta mentions that stocks of rice and millet had been preserved without suffering damage for ninety years. However, the rice which was brought out developed a black colour but possessed quite a good taste.[151] Among

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[145] Narrative of Domingos Paes in Robert Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire (Vijayanagar)* (Ireland : Irish UP, 1972) 237-238.
[146] S.harma, *Material Culture* 61.
[147] Randhawa, Vol. I 393
[148] Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 17.
[149] Qaisar, "Agricultural Technology" 79.
[150] Ashraf 118, n5.
[151] Battuta 26.

agricultural practices, the practice of grafting was known in ancient India. It was mentioned as the method of propagation of various fruits in medieval Persian tracts on horticulture and agriculture.[152]

Umari mentions the vegetables grown in the Sultanate. Turnip, carrots, vegetable marrow, egg plant, asparagus, ginger, beet-roots, onion, fennel and thyme were grown. Green ginger was cooked in the same manner as the carrot and its taste was incomparable.[153] The principal fruits grown under the Delhi Sultans were: mangoes, melons, grapes, dates, pomegranates, plantains, peaches, apples, oranges, grape-fruit, figs, lemons, *amla*, bananas, guavas, *mahwa*, tamarind, *jamun* and numerous others. The mango was a very popular fruit. Babur considered it to be the best fruit of Hindustan and was given preference over all fruits except the musk-melon.[154] When unripe, mangoes were used for conserves.[155] Pomegranates were of sweet, sour and acid taste. Figs and grapes were found in smaller quantities than other fruits. Guavas were found in India but were also imported. Pears and apples were found in a smaller quantity than guava.[156] In Daulatabad, grapes and pomegranates grew and bore fruit twice a year.[157] The tamarind (*anbli*, *imli* in Hindi) had finally cut leaves and grew wild in masses. The *mahwa* also grew wild. From its flowers, spirit (*araq*) was

[152] Irfan Habib, "Technology and Economy of Mughal India" 4.
[153] Umari 115.
[154] *Baburnama* 503.
[155] Battuta 16; *Baburnama* 503.
[156] Umari 115.
[157] Battuta 18,170.

distilled. Dried flowers were also eaten. From the seed of its fruit oil was extracted.[158] The fruit of the *mahwa* was like a small pear and extremely sweet. It bore fruit twice a year. Still another fruit was the *kasera* which was taken out of the earth and was very sweet. [159] *Jamun* was black in colour and like the olive had one stone. It was sourish and not very good.[160] Regarding bananas, Umari says, "The banana abounds in India but it is rarely planted in Delhi and the area around it. It is brought to Delhi in plenty."[161] Oranges were abundant in India. They grew well in Lamghanat, Bajaur and Sawad. The *sangtara* was a fruit resembling the orange. The large lime (*gal-gal*) also resembled the orange and was remarkably juicy. The lemon resembled the orange and was also acid.[162] The mimusops (*khirni*) was yellow coloured, small in size and had a bad after-taste. The *kamrak* was a five-sided fruit and was very bitter when gathered unripe. The jackfruit was a fruit of singular form and flavour. It was sickeningly sweet and very adhesive. The *karaunda* grew in bushes on the plains. The *amla* (the myrobalan tree) was a five-sided fruit. It was a wholesome fruit and astringent in taste.[163] Babur had some of the best musk-melon plants of Kabul brought to India and planted in his garden at Agra but their cultivation was not extensive.[164] *Tendu* was the fruit of the ebony tree and

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158 *Baburnama* 505.
159 Battuta 18.
160 Battuta 17; *Baburnama* 506.
161 Umari 115.
162 Battuta 17; *Baburnama* 510-12.
163 *Baburnama* 505-8.
164 Ashraf 119.

was extremely sweet in taste.[165] The coconut palm had a green outer husk. Its husks were used to make ropes for ships and boats and cord for sewing boat seams. The coconut in India was very good in taste. Before the kernel formed, there was fluid inside which was drunk by the people.[166]

During the fourteenth century, there was a marked development of gardens which led to the improvement of fruits, especially grapes. Muhammad Tughluq urged that the peasants should be encouraged to shift to raising grapes.[167] Firuz Tughluq is said to have built 1200 gardens in the vicinity of Delhi, 80 in the neighbourhood of Salora and 44 in Chittor. In every garden there were white and black grapes of seven varieties which were sold at the rate of one *jital* per *seer*.[168] At Daulatabad, grapes and pomegranates were grown which bore fruit twice a year; while at Sagar (on the Narmada) there were orchards of fruit-trees and the lands were irrigated by water-wheels.[169] Chittor, Dholpur, Gwalior and Jodhpur were places where improved methods of fruit cultivation and gardening were adopted. Special attention was paid to the improvement of pomegranates at Jodhpur. Sikandar Lodi declared that Persia could not produce pomegranates which were better than the Jodhpur variety in flavour.[170] In Orissa, at the time of Firuz Tughluq's invasion (1360), the inhabitants had spacious houses and fine gardens

[165] Battuta 17.
[166] Umari 115; *Baburnama* 35.
[167] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 53.
[168] Afif, trans. Jauhri 171.
[169] Battuta 170, 172.
[170] Ashraf 119, 120.

where fruit trees, flowers etc. were cultivated.[171] Shihabuddin al Umari noticed that Delhi was surrounded on three sides by gardens in straight lines, each one stretching to the extent of twelve miles. The western side was without gardens on account of the range of Aravalli hills.[172] The fruits produced in these orchards were meant mainly for the towns and the wealthy people. They may, however, have produced some employment and added to the avenues of trade. According to Afif, the garden added one lakh eighty thousand *tankas* to the income of the state.[173]

The above account shows that the agricultural policy of the Delhi Sultans included the extension of land under crop as well as initiating a scheme of stressing and playing up the role of valuable crops. It led to the building up of an urban based market economy, material prosperity and affluence. Some improvements in agricultural technology also took place, which can be ascribed to the period of the Sultanate. These developments led to improvement in agricultural production.[174]

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171 Afif, trans. Jauhri 109.
172 Umari 116.
173 Afif, trans. Jauhri 171.
174 Irfan Habib, " Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries", Unpublished Proceedings of *Seminar on Economic History of Medieval India* Aligarh (1-3 February 2003) : 9-10.

Chapter 5

DISTRIBUTION OF REVENUE RESOURCES: *IQTA*; LAND GRANTS

I

Under the Delhi Sultanate, the agrarian surplus was distributed among the members of the ruling class principally through the *iqtas*, which were territorial assignments of revenue. Literally the word *iqta* means a portion; technically it was the land or revenue assigned by the ruler to an individual. The holder of the territorial assignment was designated *muqti*. Through the *iqta* were combined the two functions of collection and distribution but without immediately endangering the unity of the political structure.[1] The territory whose revenues were directly collected by the state officials (*amils*) for the Sultan's own treasury was designated *khalisa*. Both these terms are Arabic in origin and represent long-established institutions of the polity of Islamic countries.[2]

The *iqta* had existed since the early days of Islam as a form of reward for service to the state. It appears that the system of *iqtas* in the form in which it came to India was first designed by the Caliph Muqtadir to secure a regular remittance of revenue from the governors who had made themselves almost independent

[1] Tapan Raychaudhary and Irfan Habib, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I (Hyderabad : Orient, 1984) 68.
[2] Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History : Towards a Marxist Perception* (New Delhi : Tulika, 1995) 82.

on their lands.[3] The *iqta* passed through various phases of development under the Buwaihids, Seljuqs etc. who used it to meet different situations and problems of political life. It "was systematised during the Seljuk period, and was accompanied by a major change in the theory of land ownership".[4]

Nizam-ul-mulk Tusi, a Seljuquid statesman of the 11th century gives us a classical view of the *iqta* as it had developed until just before the Ghorian conquest of northern India.[5] He writes :

> Officers (*muqtis*) who hold lands in fief (*iqta*) must know that they have no authority over the peasants except to take from them – and that with courtesy – the due amount of revenue which has been assigned to them to collect; and when they have taken that, the peasants are to have security for their persons, property, wives and children, and their goods and farms are to be inviolable; the assignees are to have no further claim upon them .... They must know that the country and the peasants belong to the ruling power; assignees and governors are like prefects over the peasants [on their fiefs], in the same relation to them as the king is to other peasants [not on feudal lands].[6]

Tusi further writes, "Every two or three years tax collectors and assignees should be changed lest they become too securely established and entrenched, and begin to cause anxiety".[7]

Thus, the *iqta* was an assignment of revenue allotted to the members of the ruling class in lieu of salary. The

[3] K.M. Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1970) 86.
[4] A.K.S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* (London : OUP, 1953) 49.
[5] For the development of the *iqta* in the Pre Ghurid kingdoms see Jabir S. Raza, "Iqta System in the Pre Ghurid Kingdoms and its Antecedents", *Indian History Congress* 54th Session Mysore (1993).
[6] Nizamul-mulk Tusi, *Siyasatnama*, Eng. Trans. Hubert Darke, *The Book of Government or Rules For Kings* (London : Routledge, 1978) 33.
[7] Tusi 43.

assignees designated *muqtis* had the right to collect and appropriate *kharaj* and other taxes from the *iqta*. The nature of assignment was a transferable one. The large *iqtas*, however, carried administrative responsibilities and the assignee was expected to maintain law and order in his territory and supply contingents to the centre in times of emergency. These troops were to be maintained out of the revenues of the *iqtas*. Tusi records that the earlier kings paid their soldiers in cash from the central treasury.[8] Small *iqtas* were also given to soldiers in lieu of salary.[9] The smaller assignments carried neither any administrative duties nor any financial liabilities to the central exchequer and these small *iqtadars* were permitted simply to realize revenues of some portion of land in lieu of military service.

With the Ghorian conquest, the *iqta* system was introduced in India. Initially, the areas conquered were divided up among commanders who maintained themselves and their troops mainly by plunder and forced collection of tribute. There are several references in the *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* of conquered areas being placed in charge of military commanders.[10] The practice of *iqta* assignments was so familiar to the conquerors that these commanders were designated *muqtis* and their territorial jurisdictions were called *iqtas*. Siraj refers to the fief of Kuhram

[8] Tusi 103. This system was called *bistgani*.

[9] Tusi 102. "The troops must receive their pay regularly. Those who are assignees of course have their salaries to hand independently as assigned."

[10] Minhaj-us Siraj, *Tabaqat-i Nasiri*, Eng. trans. H.G. Raverty, Vol. I (1897; New Delhi : Book, 1970) 464, 469.Muhammad Ghuri left the *Kazi* of Tulak in charge of the fortress of Tabarhindah and Malik Qutubuddin in charge of the fort of Kuhram.

being placed in charge of Qutubuddin Aibak by Muhammad Ghori in 1191.[11] He also refers to Ali Karmakh as the *wali* (governor) of Multan.[12] The words, *muqti* and *wali* are used interchangeably and according to Moreland, the fact that we occasionally read of the *muqti* of a *wilayat* suggests that the terms were, at least practically, synonymous.[13]

Qutubuddin Aibak (1206-1210) and Iltutmish (1211-36) used the *iqta* system as an instrument for liquidating the feudal order of Indian society and linking up the far-flung parts of the empire to one centre.[14] Through it, an effective administration was made possible, law and order was maintained, and the collection of revenues in the newly conquered territories was ensured. Under Aibak, conditions remained largely the same as before; but a gradual process seems to have begun that ultimately converted what were autonomous principalities into real *iqtas*.

The *iqta* system was well established during the reign of Iltutmish. This is clear from the biographical sketches of a number of slave officers of Iltutmish given by Minhaj.[15] Iltutmish and his successors enforced the practice of transferring *muqtis* from one *iqta* to another. *Malik* Tughan Khan was made the *muqti* of Badaun and later Lakhnauti.[16] Similarly *Malik*

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[11] Siraj 469, 515.
[12] Siraj 456.
[13] W.H. Moreland, *The Agrarian System of Moslem India* (1929; New Delhi : Atlantic, 1994) 222. *Iqta* and *muqti* were sometimes referred to as *wilayat* and *wali* respectively.
[14] Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Religion and Politics in India During the Thirteenth Century*, new ed. (New Delhi : OUP, 2002) 138.
[15] Siraj 722-865.
[16] Siraj 736.

Tughril Khan became the *muqti* of Lahore, Kannauj and Awadh in succession and finally received Lakhnauti.[17] Thus the transfers of *iqtas* became frequent and the *muqti* could be posted anywhere from Lahore to Lakhnauti at the Sultan's discretion. The *muqtis* were required to furnish military assistance to the Sultan but there is no evidence to indicate if the *muqti* had to maintain a fixed number of troops or remit a particular amount of surplus to the Sultan's treasury. The *muqti* was free to sub-assign small *iqtas* from his own larger *iqta* to anyone he chose and this was probably a method of paying his troops.[18]

There is very little information on the extent of *khalisa* lands under the early Turkish Sultans. In what appears to be the first reference to *khalisa* in India, Iltutmish is said to have appointed one of his slaves as the 'Superintendent of the *Khalisah* (crown province) of Tabarhindah'.[19] Apparently Delhi itself, together with the surrounding district, including parts of the *Doab* was in the Sultan's *khalisa*. It appears that Iltutmish assigned villages in the *Doab* to individual troopers of the central army (*qalb*) in lieu of their salaries. These *iqta* holders were known as *iqtadars* and according to Barani numbered two thousand during the reign of Iltutmish.[20]

By the time of Balban's reign, many of the original grantees were dead, those who survived were too old and infirm

[17] Siraj 762.

[18] For example, Malik Tajuddin Sanjar, *muqti* of Badaun assigned a fief for the maintenance of Minhaj in 1242-3. See Siraj 756.

[19] Siraj 746.

[20] Ziauddin Barani, *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, Eng. trans. Elliot and Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. III (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, n.d.) 107.

to render any military service. Sons had been allowed to succeed their fathers and the holders of these service lands called themselves proprietors claiming hereditary rights over them.[21] Balban instituted an inquiry into the terms and tenure of the *iqtas* given to two thousand Turkish soldiers in the *Doab*. The Sultan passed orders for the resumption of *iqtas* of the old and infirm soldiers and gave them pensions of forty or fifty *tankas*. The assignments of those who were young and able bodied and willing to perform their duties were continued. Pensions were granted to widows and orphans of the deceased fief-holders. These orders caused a hue and cry among the *Shamsi* grantees and were subsequently withdrawn at the intercession of Fakhruddin, the aged *kotwal* of Delhi.[22] Thus Balban could effect no change in the *iqta* system. However, the principle of hereditary *iqta* was definitely rejected by him and a *khwaja* was assigned to watch and control the activities of the *muqtis*. The appointment of such an officer by the Sultan on the recommendation of the *wazir* suggests the desire on the part of the Central Government to keep an eye on the divisional revenue and put a sort of check on the activities of the *muqtis*.[23] The Sultan's government began to investigate what was actually collected and spent within the *iqta*.

The position of the *muqti* in the *iqta* system indicates

[21] Barani, *Tarikh* 107. Barani writes that they professed to have received the lands in free gift from Sultan Shamsuddin.

[22] Barani, *Tarikh* 107-8. The assignments were allowed to develop into grants free from liability.

[23] R.P. Tripathi, *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration* (1936; Allahabad : Central Book Depot, 1992) 251.

that it was a bureaucratic organization and not feudal.[24] The officials were appointed by the Sultan and could be transferred, removed or punished at his pleasure. They were also subjected to the financial control of the revenue ministry.

By the last decade of the thirteenth century, the surplus revenues of the *iqtas* began to be remitted to the central treasury.[25] The first known concrete instance of such a practice is when Alauddin Khalji (before his accession) asked for postponement of the demand for the surplus revenues (*fawazil*) of his *iqtas* of Kara and Awadh, so that he could utilize the money for enlisting additional troops.[26]

During the reign of Alauddin Khalji (1296-1316), there was considerable expansion in the limits of the empire and an attempt was made to establish a uniform land tax over a large part of northern India. Accordingly, it had important effects on the *iqta* system. The extent of *khalisa* land increased and areas nearer to the capital were absorbed in it. It now covered Delhi and the River country together with part of North Rohilkhand.[27] Alauddin was opposed to the system of assignments and a general order of confiscation of property of many nobles in the court and the *iqtas* was issued.[28] The practice of issuing grants of land in lieu of state service was stopped. Alauddin Khalji recruited the army directly and paid the soldiers in cash from the

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[24] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 221.
[25] If Barani has not read a later practice into the past, the Sultans began to insist on the remittance of excess amounts well before the fall of Balban's dynasty.
[26] Barani, *Tarikh* 148-49.
[27] See Moreland, Agrarian System 38.
[28] Barani, *Tarikh* 179.

state treasury.[29] Thus the system of paying the Sultan's own cavalry troops (*hashm*) by assignment of villages as *iqtas* was abolished.

However, the practice of giving *iqtas* was not totally abolished. Alauddin only "abrogated the privileges of the landlord class, crushed their contumacy and compelled them to lead a life of frugality if not of destitution."[30] The practice continued in, at least, some parts of the empire.[31] Barani writes that the nobles who had no villages or lands got rationed grain in times of scarcity.[32] This indicates that there were nobles who had landed property. The retention of the *iqta* system was "probably considered necessary in the territories which had either been recently conquered or had not been fully subdued."[33] The extent of intervention of the Sultan's bureaucracy in the administration of the *iqtas*, however, increased. Several audits were undertaken. Even the papers of the village accountants (*patwaris*) were audited in order to detect fraud and harsh punishments were given for small misappropriations.[34] The *muqti* could not appropriate a single shell out of the state revenue apart from the legitimate expenditure approved by the revenue ministry. He received a fixed amount of the revenue as his own pay and emoluments.[35]

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[29] Barani, *Tarikh* 191.
[30] Kishori Saran Lal, *History of the Khaljis A.D. 1290-1320* (Bombay : Asia , 1967) 188.
[31] Barani, *Tarikh* 191.
[32] Barani, *Tarikh* 195.
[33] Tripathi 267.
[34] Barani, *Tarikh* 183.
[35] See S.B.P. Nigam, *Nobility Under The Sultans of Delhi* (Delhi : Munshiram, 1968) 99-100.

Ghiyasuddin Tughluq had no radical changes to introduce in the *iqta* system except to propound moderation. The Finance Department was ordered not to increase the annual estimate of income of an *iqta* or *wilayat* by over one-tenth or one-eleventh since the burden of any such enhancement could be passed on by the *muqti* to the peasantry.[36] The *muqtis* were instructed to be generous to their staff and not to covet the smallest fraction of the salaries of the troops. They were allowed to take the ordinary perquisites of the post described as "a half-tenth or half-eleventh and the one-tenth or one-fifteenth of the revenue". Similarly the subordinate officers were permitted to appropriate a half or one percent in addition to their salaries. This, however, did not mean that he permitted them to embezzle the assessed '*jama*' or deduct any larger amount as their own share.[37] In such cases they were declared as robbers and deceivers and were subjected to humiliations and the disgrace of flogging and fetters.

Heavy responsibility was cast on the shoulders of the governors or *muqtis* who were to see that revenue was realized without oppression and high-handedness, that excessive demands were not made from the peasants and that the village headmen did not pass on their liabilities to the peasants. In turn, they were enjoined to be scrupulously fair and honest on pain of being treated with rudeness and severity by the ministry of revenue. [38]

[36] Barani, *Tarikh* 230.
[37] Tripathi 272.
[38] Mohammad Habib and Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, ed., *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. V (Delhi : PPH, 1970) 468-69.

By prohibiting the governors from levying excessive demands on the peasants and the revenue ministry from making arbitrary demands on the governors, the Sultan "sought to avoid the creation of strained relations between the revenue ministry and provincial governors, which had been a prominent feature of the administrative system of Alauddin Khalji."[39]

Under Muhammad Tughluq (1325-51), the tendency towards royal intervention reached its peak. The *Masalik-ul-Absar* gives a description of the *iqta* system as it functioned under this Sultan. A close study of this Arabic work indicates that the two functions of collecting taxes and maintaining the troops were now separated. The troops were centrally recruited and paid. Shihabuddin al-Umari writes that the nobles were assigned ranks in the army. The highest rank was that of the *Khan*; then came *Malik*, *Amir*, *Isfahla*[40] and in the last sepoy. There were nine lakh *sawars* in the royal army, a fixed number being stationed in Delhi while the rest were distributed in different parts of the empire.[41] Regarding the salary and allowances of the army men, Umari writes :

> Contrary to the custom in Egypt and Syria, the *Khans*, *Maliks* *Amirs* and *Isfahlas* of the Sultan (Muhammad bin Tughluq) do not assign *iqtas* to their soldiers (in lieu of cash salary). Every officer is rather responsible for his own expenditure. The soldiers are employed by the Sultan himself and they are paid their pay and allowances by the state exchequer. The

[39] Agha Mahdi Husain, *Tughluq Dynasty* (New Delhi : S. Chand, 1976) 63.
[40] *Sipahsalar*.
[41] Shihabuddin al-Umari, *Masalik-ul-Absar*, Eng. trans. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources of Information on the Life and Conditions of the Sultanate of Delhi* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1992) 117.

iqtas assigned to the *Khan*, *Malik*, *Amir* or *Isfahla*, are for their own personal expenses.[42]

Umari further states that the estimated income of the *iqta*, against which the salary was adjusted, was always less than the actual revenue that it yielded.[43] The above account makes it clear that the system of revenue assignment in lieu of military service was considerably stopped. The troops were generally paid in cash from the treasury and the *iqtas* represented only the personal salary of the commanders.

In several cases the Sultan handed over the collection of the revenue of the *iqtas* to either the revenue farmers or his own financial officers. The commanders or *amirs* posted in the *iqtas* had nothing to do directly with revenue collection. Ibn Battuta gives an account of the *hazar* of Amroha which tells us how such dual administration worked. The *hazar* of Amroha, he says, had a '*wali-ul-kharaj*'. The *wali*, Aziz Khammar in this case, had 1500 villages under his charge, yielding an estimated revenue of 60 lakh *tankas*. From this amount the *wali* took 1/20th for his own pay and the rest was paid into the imperial treasury. Along with the *wali*, there was an *amir* (military commander) in the same territory.[44] The *walis* often held their assignments on farming terms i.e. *iqtas* were given to those nobles who promised to pay the maximum annual tribute to the centre.[45] Barani tells us

[42] Umari 117-118.
[43] Umari 118.
[44] Ibn Battuta, *Rehla*, Eng. trans. Mahdi Husain (Baroda : Oriental Institute, 1953) 144-46.
[45] These arrangements were typical after the attempt at centralized administration had broken down.

of Nusrat Khan who took the contract of the *iqta* of Bidar and the surrounding territories for a payment of one crore of *tankas*.[46] Similarly Nizam Main had undertaken to farm the revenue of Kara for a payment of several lakhs of *tankas*.[47]

With the accession of Firuz Tughluq (1351-88), the entire trend of the preceding period was reversed. A series of concessions were given which benefitted the nobility. He decreed that the valuation (*mahsul*) of the empire be settled afresh. After six years it was settled at six crores and seventy five lakh *tankas*. The figure was designated '*jama*' and it remained unchanged during the forty years of the reign of Firuz Shah. The fixity of *jama* meant that the assignees obtained all benefits of increase in actual revenue collection. The auditing of the accounts of the *muqtis* in this period was also lenient.[48] Firuz Shah also increased the personal pay of his great nobles. Afif writes :

> Khan-i-Jahan, for the maintenance of his troops, sons and dependents, received thirteen lakh *tankas*. In lieu of this amount, he was assigned numerous *Iqtas* and *Parganahs*. Similarly, others according to their ranks got eight lakhs or six lakhs or four lakhs as their salary. On account of this policy of the Sultan, *Khans* and *Maliks* became wealthy. Each one of them possessed wealth, jewels and the gold and diamonds.[49]

In general, Firuz Tughluq's policy was to assign away lands in *iqtas*, thus reducing the extent of the *khalisa*. Within the

[46] Barani, *Tarikh* 247.
[47] Mahdi Husain, *Tughluq Dynasty* 255.
[48] Shams-i-Siraj Afif, *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, Eng. trans. R.C. Jauhri, *Medieval India in Transition – Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi A First Hand Account* (New Delhi : Sundeep; 2001) 193-94, 262-63.
[49] Afif, trans. Jauhri 171-72.

khalisa which remained, he re-established the system of paying soldiers by assigning them the revenues of villages as *wajh* in lieu of their salaries (*mawajib*).[50]

Soldiers who were not assigned *wajh*, were paid their salaries in cash from the treasury, or by way of drafts (*itlaq*, *barat*) on the *iqtas* of the nobles, to be adjusted against the payment of 'excess' due from them to the treasury.[51] However, the soldiers could obtain only half of their claim from the *iqtas* held by the nobles. They could also sell the assignment order (*itlaq*) to a broker in Delhi and get one-third of the amount. The purchase of assignment orders became an important source of income for the city brokers. Afif says :

> Non-regular troopers were paid cash from the treasury. Since the regular troopers' assignments were in respect of their *Iqtas*, hence each one of them received at least one half of the revenue of the *Iqtas*. In those days, some people used to buy the assignment of the soldiers with the consent of the soldiers as well as the state. The buyers earned profit out of these, keeping one third with them. Many such buyers became wealthy and made it their profession.[52]

Firuz Shah believed in the principle of heredity and declared all offices to be hereditary. It was his policy to allow the heir of an *amir*, a *muqti* or an official to inherit his father's position, title and *iqtas* or other emoluments. In the *Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi*, he himself says that, "When any officials of the state who enjoyed

[50] Afif, trans. Jauhri 73. Troops paid in this manner were known as *wajhdars*; the others were known as *ghair-wajhis*. See Afif, trans. Jauhri 135.
[51] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 73.
[52] Afif, trans. Jauhri 171. Afif gives the designation of *wajhdar* also to soldiers receiving pay by *itlaq*.

honours and high status passed away by the will of God, their offices and salaries were given to their sons, so that they may continue to enjoy a dignity, rank and status similar to that of their fathers."[53] Firuz made the rule that :

> If a person (soldier) in the army died, then his assignment and position be transferred to his son; if he had no son then to his son-in-law; if he had no son-in-law then to his slave; if there was no slave, then to one of his male relatives; and if there was no relative either, then to his womenfolk. The Sultan followed this policy and during the forty years of his reign, everyone remained contented.[54]

This rule was maintained throughout Firuz Tughluq's reign. For instance, when *Khan-i-Jahan* died, his office of his *wazir* and his title both passed to his son Jauna Shah, whose title was to be *Khan-i-Jahan bin Khan-i-Jahan*.[55] Similarly, after the death of the *ariz* Imad-ul-Mulk, his son Malik Ishaq obtained the post and the title of Imad-ul-Mulk. Such examples could be multiplied and extended to all levels of the bureaucracy.[56]

Firuz Shah's policy proved long lasting and under the Lodis (1451-1526), the conditions remained essentially similar. There was a reorganization : the administrative charges and the revenue assignments were assimilated so that *sarkars* and *parganas* represented administrative divisions as well as assignments.[57] Each *sarkar* was assigned a *jama,* or estimated

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[53] Firuz Shah, *Futuhat-i-Firoz Shahi*, Eng. trans. Azra Alavi (Delhi : IAD, 1996) 33.
[54] Afif, trans. Jauhri 73-74.
[55] Afif, trans. Jauhri 234.
[56] Afif, trans. Jauhri 243, 261. In the *diwan-i-wizarat*, *Khwaja* Rukn-ud-din, son of *Khwaja* Junaidi, and *Khwaja* Ain-ud-din, son of *Khwaja* Sharaf Malwa had been appointed to the posts held by their fathers.
[57] For fiscal purposes the province was divided into *sarkars*, the latter being subdivided into *parganas*.

revenue whose purpose could be to lay the military and other obligations of the noble holding the assignment.[58] During the Lodi period, assignment was the most important agrarian institution. The assignee was bound not merely to loyalty and personal service, but had to maintain a body of troops out of the assigned income and make them available to the king when required. Assignments would thus be fewer in number, but individually more extensive, than in the reign of Firuz.[59] Bahlul Lodi (1451-89) followed the practice of giving assignments; it was his offer of assignments which attracted to India the Afghan tribes inhabiting the Roh. These tribes wanted to share the benefits of the new empire.[60] It is said about Bahlul that, "Whatever came into his possession in money, goods or new *parganas*, he distributed all among his troops."[61] Sultan Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517) did not claim the balance if the revenue income of the assignee increased beyond the officially sanctioned figure. He used to say, "Whatever his good fortune has brought to him, it should remain with him."[62] The principal assignees maintained their troops by sub-assigning parts of their territories to their subordinates who, in turn, could pay their soldiers by the same means. For example, during the reign of

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[58] Babur gives a list of the *sarkars* which had come under his domination along with the revenue of each in *tankas*. See Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, *Baburnama*, Eng. trans. A.S. Beveridge, Vol. I & II (1922; New Delhi : Oriental Reprint, 1970) 521.

[59] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 67.

[60] Awadh Bihari Pandey, *The First Afghan Empire in India 1451-1526 A.D.* (Calcutta : Bookland, 1956) 216-17.

[61] Abdullah, *Tarikh-i-Daudi*, Eng. trans. Elliot and Dowson, *The History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. IV (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, 1964) 436.

[62] Shaikh Rizq Ullah Mushtaqui, *Waqiat-e-Mushtaqui*, ed. and Eng. trans. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui (New Delhi : NBC, 1993) 65.

Sikandar Lodi, the *subah* of Jaunpur was conferred on Jamal Khan with the order to keep up 12000 horsemen and to assign them *jagirs*. Jamal Khan, in turn, gave Hasan Khan (father of Farid Khan – the later Sher Shah) the *parganas* of Sahsaram, Hajipur and Tanda in *jagir* to maintain 500 horsemen. Hasan Khan gave the administration of his two *parganas* to Farid and gave him the power both to grant and to resume the soldier's *jagirs*.[63] Under the Lodis, not only did the assignees hold most of the lands of the kingdom, but any increases in the land revenue, due to good harvests remained with them. In former times, under stronger central governments the State forced the assignees to send any surplus income over the nominal valuation of the assignment to the revenue ministry at the centre but the Afghan retained all the revenues collected by them and most of the revenues of the kingdom did not return to the centre for redistribution.[64]

The traditional *iqta* system continued unchanged under the Surs also and they did not usher any change in it. They also assigned their nobles the revenues of *parganas* and sarkars according to their rank and position in lieu of cash salary; these *parganas* and *sarkars* were called the *wajahdari iqta*.[65] Sher Shah might have tried to remove some of the worst features of the *jagir* system but there is no evidence for it. Sher Shah's son and

[63] Abbas Khan Sarwani, *Tarikh-i-Sher Shahi* or *Tuhfa-i Akbar Shahi*, Eng. trans. Elliot and Dowson, Vol. IV (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, 1964) 310-11.
[64] John F. Richards, "The Economic History of the Lodi Period : 1451-1526" in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ed., *Money and Market in India 1100-1700* (Delhi : OUP, 1998) 153.
[65] Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *Some Aspects of Afghan Despotism in India* (Aligarh : Three Men, 1969) 150.

successor, Islam Shah continued his father's policy in most respects. Although Islam Shah is reported to have abolished the *iqta* system and established the system of cash payment instead by bringing the whole empire under *khalisa*,[66] a careful study shows that it continued even during his reign. It is true that he increased the *khalisa* territories and paid a large number of nobles in cash, but it is also reported that he "assigned *parganas* to men in *jagir* (*iqtas*)."[67]

Although the *iqta* was in origin a revenue assignment, the *muqti* was not some remote pensionary or military aide at court who had no connection with the territory in his grant, but an officer who incurred genuine administrative responsibilities. The evidence contained in the royal *farmans*, issued by the Sultans of Delhi concerning the conduct of the governors, clearly shows that the Sultans attached great importance to the progress of agriculture and trade both internal and foreign from the very beginning of the Sultanate.[68]

In the injunctions said to have been issued to Malik Husam-ud-din Ughalbak by Qutbuddin Aibak in connection with the latter's posting at Koil (near modern Aligarh), Ughalbak is directed to check the oppressive officers and redress the grievances of the domestic servants, soldiers and peasants through inquiry so that they may become his (governor's) loyal

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[66] Daudi 479.

[67] Mushtaqui 135.

[68] See "The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century Farmans Concerning the Conduct of the Governors Under the Sultans of Delhi" in Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources of Information on the Life and Conditions of the Sultanate of Delhi* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1992) 168.

and devoted well-wishers. He is further directed to ensure the safety of highways and encourage and protect the traders who come with the best products of each country.[69] Similarly, when Fath Khan was appointed the governor of Sind by Firuz Shah, he was directed to promote agriculture, look after the prosperity of the subjects and make all efforts to create conditions in the region conducive to economic development. The peasants were to be treated kindly and encouraged in their work. An honest and efficient revenue minister was to be appointed to deal with the peasantry properly and to check corruption on the part of the revenue officials.[70]

Some of the *muqtis* did attain these high standards. The Bayana region owed its flourishing condition to the efforts of its first *muqti* appointed in 1196 and under him the generality of the subjects were content. The governor of Uchh also strove for the security and repose of the peasants. This does not necessarily testify to an enlightened outlook on the part of the *muqti* who had a vested interest in the material condition of the tract of which he enjoyed the revenues.[71]

The main features of the *iqta* system may be summarized as follows:

a) The *iqta* was a territorial assignment of revenue conditional on military service

[69] Hasan Nizami, *Taj-ul-Maasir*, Eng. trans. Bhagwat Saroop (Delhi : Saud Ahmad Dehlavi, 1998) 176-81; Qureshi 198.

[70] Ainuddin Abdullah bin Mahru, *Insha-i-Mahru*, partial Eng. trans. Shaikh Abdur Rashid (Lahore, 1965) 15; Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources* 183-84.

[71] Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate: A Political and Military History* (Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 1999) 98.

b) The assignees were designated *muqtis* but the term was used only for persons who held the administrative charge of the territories.

c) Small *iqtas* were assigned to soldiers in lieu of salary. This practice of granting assignments to troopers was restricted by Alauddin Khalji but under Firuz Tughluq, it again became common.

d) The *muqti* had no territorial position of his own and he held office only at the pleasure of the Sultan.

e) The *muqti* was expected to contribute his own share of the military contingents fixed by the king, in times of emergency.

f) He was also responsible for the collection of revenues, dispensation of justice, maintenance of communications and other matters concerning civil administration.

g) The *muqtis* were under obligation to remit their surplus revenues to the state treasury.[72]

h) All accounts of income and expenditure maintained by them were audited and misappropriation was severely dealt with.

i) The assignment system continued throughout the period although Alauddin Khalji tried to restrict it.

Irfan Habib points out three stages in the history of the *iqta* system. First, during the thirteenth century there was a simple division of the empire among tribute-receiving governors.

[72] Afif, trans. Jauhri 237; U.N. Day, *The Government of the Sultanate*, 2nd. ed. (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1993) 93-94.

Then, in the first half of the fourteenth century, an enlargement of the revenue demand and therefore the income of the *iqta* took place, while an extreme degree of royal control was established over the *iqta*. Finally, in the third stage i.e. from the middle of the fourteenth to the early years of the sixteenth century, there was a reversion to the simpler forms of *iqta* organization, the difference being that the assignees directly appropriated the bulk of the peasants' surplus for themselves.[73]

II

Another form of alienation of the king's revenue besides the *iqta*, existed which went largely to maintain the intelligentsia and other dependents of the ruling class. Moreland terms them as grants which were assignments of revenue of relatively small areas, given to persons for life. They were often, in fact hereditary, but were subject to resumption at the Sultan's pleasure. The king's share due from a specified area was granted to any one of larger classes of claimants, "by way of pensions for past service, rewards for good conduct, or for literary or artistic achievement, maintenance of deserving individuals, or of religious, educational or charitable endowments, and the like".[74] The terms used for these grants were termed *milk* (proprietary rights given by the State), *inam* (gifts), *idrarat* (pensions).[75] Grants assigned to or for the maintenance of religious

[73] Irfan Habib, *Essays* 85-86.
[74] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 10.
[75] Barani, *Tarikh* 171, 179.

institutions, like *madrasahs*, mosques, mystic establishments (*khanqahs*), tombs, etc. were called *waqf* (plural *auqaf*).[76]

The Sultans of Delhi treated the *mashaikh* (saints) and the *ulama* (religious scholars) with respect and made maintenance grants to them as much an act of piety as a gesture which brought fame and prosperity to them. The land-grants conferred upon the saints and religious scholars for subsistence became an institution of social and economic importance in due course of time and continued to exist throughout the period of Islamic rule.[77] The *Insha-i Mahru* refers to an *Arzdasht* regarding endowments in the territories of Multan, which was submitted to Sultan Firuz Shah for confirmation by the governor of Multan, Ain-ul-Mulk Mahru in 1361. The lands so granted were divided into two categories : those intended for the upkeep of the mausoleums of past kings, and those for the benefit of the *ulama*, the *mashaikh* and such *amirs* who brought under the plough dead lands.[78] Amir Khusrau refers to a letter of recommendation given by him to a high official of the government, probably connected with the revenue department, who was vested with the authority to grant land and gifts to men of learning and of genuine piety. In this letter Khusrau suggests that if any one wanted a town or village to earn his lawful bread which was without any suspicion or taint of unlawfulness it should be granted to him. Further, if anyone sought favour in the form of *Idrar*, it should be

[76] *Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi* 28.
[77] Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, "*Wajh-i-Maash* Grants Under the Afghan Kings 1451-1555" in *Medieval India - A Miscellany*, Vol. II (Bombay : Asia, 1972) 19.
[78] Mahru 17-18.

sanctioned to such an extent and in such a way that he might not have to approach anyone else.[79]

The Sultan conferred the grant by normally issuing a *farman*. On the basis of this paper document, lands were made over to the grantees not only within the *khalisa* but also within the *iqta*. A document of the thirteenth century, supposed to be a grant by way of *Inam* to a warrior chief, is given in the *Risail-ul-Ijaz* of Amir Khusrau as follows :

> I have ordered all cultivators who break the earth and put the seed therein that they, with the help of natural rains, should grow and produce pearl-like grains. They who are as numerous as the particles of sands have been made to enjoy my favours and protection so that they can maintain cultivation in proper condition, and I nurse and encourage them in these respects. I have also decreed an *Inam* grant from the beginning of Rabi, 723, of as many as ten units of ploughable land (*Dah-i-Juft wanan*) in the environs of village Dhulkoot to *Amir Sipahsalar*, favourite of the king .... Harisuddin Dahqan-i-Zamin-dawar ... so that out of what he gets as proceeds from that barren (short) land he may devote something by way of charity (*Tasadduq*) to the sepulchres of those destitute but pious people whose dishevelled hairs are loaded with dust, who have only two sheets of cloth to cover their body, and who enjoy such spiritual position that whatever they swear by God is made true by God.[80]

Mahru points out that the grantees were given both cultivated and uncultivated lands since the surrender of cultivated lands to provide for new grants would have greatly reduced the *muqti's* own revenues.[81]

The grants were not normally transferable or resumable but the Sultan always had a right to cancel them.

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[79] S.H. Askari, *Amir Khusrau as a Historian, Collected Works of Prof. S.H. Asksri*, Vol. II (Patna : Khuda Bakhsh Library, 1992) 99-100.
[80] Askari 131.
[81] Mahru 22-23.

Alauddin Khalji ordered that, "wherever there was a village held by proprietary right (*milk*), in free gift (*inam*), or as a religious endowment (*waqf*), it should by one stroke of the pen be brought back under the exchequer."[82] These grants were almost exclusively held by the Muslims. The State claimed to be the final authority with reference to all charitable endowments, by whomsoever made. Most of the grants were revoked but we know for certain that Alauddin permitted many exceptions to his order.[83] Still, the order was applicable to the entire kingdom and Barani tells us that the effect was that in Delhi, "excepting *maliks* and *amirs*, officials, *Multanis*, and bankers, no one possessed even a trifle in cash."[84] The Muslims must have felt the change keenly, but apart from Barani's vague general statement we have no data regarding the actual extent of the loss and suffering caused to the Muslim community. Ghiyasuddin Tughluq also resumed a large number of grants made by his predecessors.

Firuz Tughluq not only made many new grants but also restored to the claimants large numbers of grants which had been resumed by his predecessors. In the *Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi*, he says :

> Another of the favours of Gods relates to villages and lands held as *imlak*[85] which had, in former times, been confiscated for a variety of reasons by the state and were recorded in the *Diwan* as crown properties. I ordered that anybody who had proof of claims to such lands should present it before the *Diwan-i-Sharai* and once his title was established, the

[82] Barani, *Tarikh* 179.
[83] Habib and Nizami 350.
[84] Barani, *Tarikh* 179.
[85] or *amlak*, plural of *milk* (proprietary right).

> village, land or other property that had been assumed by the state would be transferred back to the claimant.[86]

Firuz Shah also re-instituted the grant of villages, lands, former endowments attached to *madrasahs*, mausoleum and tombs of respected former rulers and famous *shaikhs* so that the needs of the holy places and those who visited them would be provided for. Moreover, if there was no endowment or other provisions at the same place, arrangements were made for it so that the charitable work could continue forever and itinerant scholars and holy men might rest there and pray.[87]

Sultan Firuz Shah was always solicitous of the well-being of the poor, needy, aged, orphans, widows and learned and devout Muslims. The religious and literary men like the *Ulama*, the *Mashaikh*, the *Muftis*, the *Muzkirs*, the *Hafizs*, the *Haidaris* and the *Qalandars* were awarded handsome stipends and subsistence allowances to ensure their whole-hearted devotion to the cause of education, learning and religion. The *khanqahs* (hospice) of the *sufi* saints like *Shaikh* Farid-ud-din, Baha-ud-din, Nizam-ud-din, Rukn-ud-din, Jamal-ud-din and others were also given sufficient grants.[88]

An idea can be formed of the extent of lands held in the grants by certain statements made by Afif. Afif says that "the Sultan had granted thirty six lakh tankas as maintenance grant (*Madad-i-Maash*) in favour of the *Ulama*, *Shaikhs* and holy

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[86] *Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi* 31.
[87] *Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi* 30.
[88] R.C. Jauhri, *Firoz Tughluq 1351-88 A.D.*, 2nd ed. (Jalandhar : ABS, 1990) 131; Afif, trans. Jauhri 95.

persons (*Sufi*)".[89] Since the total revenues of the Sultanate, according to Afif, were estimated officially at six crore and seventy five lakh *tankas*, the *idrar* grants represented an alienation of about 5.33 percent of the total revenues. This, however, refers only to grants conferred by the Sultans. The *muqtis* and nobles also made similar grants out of their *iqtas*. Balban, when, still a noble, granted a village in the Hansi region, and another village together with a pension in cash to the historian Minhaj-us-Siraj on the completion of his *Tabaqat*.[90] A *malik* of Alauddin Khalji's time offered to make a grant of gardens and cultivated lands to the Chisti saint, Shaikh Nizamuddin. It is not certain whether these grants survived the transfers of the *iqta's* from the hands of the grantors.[91]

During the Afghan period (1451-1555) the appellation, employed both in the official documents and contemporary Persian literature for these land grants to the pious and scholarly people appears to have been *wajh-i-maash* (allowance for subsistence), *wajh-i-milk*, *amlak* (plural of *milk*), *wazifa* (stipend), *wazaif* (plural of *wazifa*), *waqf* and *Auqaf* (plural of *waqf*) and *Inam* (grants).[92] As early as the fourteenth century, the term *aimma* began to be used for the revenue grantees as a complimentary epithet.[93] Sultan Bahlul Lodi, the

[89] Afif, trans. Jauhri 115.
[90] Jackson 101. See also Siraj 756, 821-22.
[91] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 76.
[92] Siddiqui, "*Wajh-i-Maash* Grants" 19-20.
[93] The use of this word continued in the sixteenth century. In the seventeenth century, while *aimma* came to mean the land granted, the term *aimmadar* (holder of *aimma*) was coined for the grantee. See Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707*, 2nd ed. (Delhi : OUP, 2000) 342-43, 353-54, 360.

founder of the Lodi dynasty is reported to have been very kind to the *ulama* and saints.[94] Under his successors the number of the grantees increased considerably. Sultan Sikandar Lodi was anxious to revive the past traditions of learning and scholarship and for this purpose, the *ulama* were given stipends and lands for subsistence in large number. Mushtaqui informs us that in every city, a huge amount of money was disbursed from the treasury two times a year for the scholars, learned men, widows and other deserving people. Officers were ordered to prepare a list of the deserving people in each *muhalla* (settlement) under their charge and to send to everyone whatever was fixed for him regularly. Sultan Sikandar specifically mentioned in the *farmans* issued to the nobles, with regard to their maintenance *iqtas*, that the *imlak* and *wazaif* were excluded from them, so that the grantees holding land might not be deprived of their sustenance-land. If any noble was reported to have disobeyed the royal *farman* by oppressing anyone who held *wajh-i-maash*, he was severely punished.[95] Ibrahim Lodi, Sikandar Lodi's successor not only renewed and confirmed the land grants given by his successors but also favoured many new persons in an attempt to earn good name. The available evidence shows that he surpassed even the first two Lodi Sultans by conferring sustenance land to everyone who approached him without inquiring whether he deserved it or not. The land grantees took advantage of the chaos and anarchy caused by the rebellions of the nobles in his times, and with the

[94] Daudi 436.
[95] Mushtaqui 18.

connivance of the *amils* occupied more land than they were allotted.[96]

Under the Surs also, the scholars, *saiyids* and pious persons were given land grants for their maintenance. Sher Shah was doubtful about the integrity of many grantees who had obtained land grants since the time of Ibrahim Lodi by foul means. Sher Shah, therefore resumed their holdings, made satisfactory investigation about the affairs of the *aimma* and then made agreeable land-grants to them so that no one was disappointed.[97] Mushtaqui also informs us that Sher Shah "resumed the land-grants of the *aima* (*ulama*, *Mashaikh*, *Saiyids* etc.) and then made grants on his own part."[98] Sher Shah, who carried forward the institutions of the Delhi Sultans, used to say about these grants that :

> It is incumbent upon kings to give grants to *imams*; for the prosperity and populousness of the cities of Hind are dependent upon the *imams* and holy men; and the teachers and travellers, and the necessitous, who cannot come to the king, they will praise him, being supported by those who have grants; and the convenience of travellers and the poor is thereby secured, as well as the extension of learning, of skill, and religion; for whoever wishes that God Almighty should make him great, should cherish *Ulama* and pious persons, that he may obtain honour in this world and felicity in the next.[99]

The economic significance of the grants was limited since they did not cover a very large area. Still, the practice of assigning part cultivated part uncultivated, idle (*akhal*), land as

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[96] Siddiqui,"*Wajh-i-Maash* Grants" 31.
[97] Sarwani 423.
[98] Mushtaqui 135.
[99] Sarwani 424.

gifts or endowment grants led to the reclamation of land.[100] Certain grantees developed their lands by planting gardens. The *Shaikhzadas* of Chanderi who were more then ten thousands in number, had planted vast gardens of fruits and flowers around Chanderi, and thus they became the proprietors of the land of gardens during the Lodi period. The ideological significance of the grants was perhaps greater. The *ulama* who enjoyed the royal grants, were expected to engage themselves in the service of society and religion. In recognition of their services, the State provided for the maintenance of their educational institutions and families.[101] Many of the assignees settled in the villages in which they were assigned maintenance-lands[102] and thus became a link between the state officers in the town and city and the rural population in the villages. They kept the officers well-informed of the conditions of the rural areas, and sometimes caused the ruin of the anti-social elements in the countryside.

[100] Hamida Khatoon Naqvi, *Agricultural, Industrial and Urban Dynamism Under the Sultans of Delhi 1206-1555* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1986) 30.
[101] Siddiqui, "*Wajh-i-Maash* Grants" 43-44.
[102] Nizami, *Religion and Politics* 341.

Chapter 6

AGRO-BASED INDUSTRIAL MANUFACTURES, TRADE AND PRICE TRENDS

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate led to three inter-related developments: (a) considerable growth in the size and possibly the number of towns (b) marked expansion in craft production and (c) a corresponding expansion in commerce.[1] From the seventh to the tenth century, trade and urbanism had suffered a distinct decline.[2] However, the revival of currency, commerce and urbanism was evident from the eleventh century onwards[3] and was carried forward in a big way, under the Delhi Sultans. The shift of balance in favour of the town against the country is an important element of Sultanate economic history. This urban growth chiefly rested on the surplus extracted by the ruling class in the form of the land tax, which was mainly distributed among its members and their dependents and retainers living within the towns.[4] Ibn Battuta who saw Delhi in 1330 writes that it was enormous in extent and had a large population.[5] Yet he says that Daulatabad too was large enough to rival Delhi

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[1] Irfan Habib, "Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,"Unpublished Proceedings of *Seminar on Economic History of Medieval India* Aligarh (1-3 February 2003) 2.

[2] For evidence see R.S. Sharma, *Urban Decay in India* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1987); M.K.Dhavalikar, *Historical Archaeology of India* (New Delhi : Books, 1999)

[3] R.S. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi : Macmillan, 1980) 198-212.

[4] Tapan Ray Chaudhary and Irfan Habib, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of India 1200-1750*, Vol. I (Hyderabad : Orient, 1984) 167-71.

[5] Ibn Battuta, *Rehla*, Eng trans. Mahdi Husain (Baroda : Oriental Institute, 1953) 24-25.

in importance and the extent of its area.[6] Other important cities were Lahore, Multan, Anhilwara (Patan), Cambay, Kara and Lakhnauti, which are mentioned in our sources without any indication of their size. Lahore was invaded by the Mongols in 1241 and was subsequently liberated in the fourteenth century.[7]

By consciously furthering a town-centered culture, the Delhi Sultans gave considerable impetus to commerce and craft production. The cities, under the new regime, were developing into thriving centres of industry and commerce.[8] Delhi became the greatest centre of industry and culture in the whole of Asia after the Ghorian conquest.[9] The artisans and other working people prospered as the new socio-political system provided them with work in the expanding towns. Moreover, the boost in trade encouraged diversity in tastes and suggested ideas for the modification and improvement of old and indigenous crafts.[10]

These developments were due to the considerable immigration of artisans and merchants from the Islamic East to India, bringing with them their crafts, techniques and practices.[11] Isami writes that craftsmen (*san`at-garan*) of all kinds and from every country had come as immigrants to Delhi.[12] They

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[6] Battuta 168-169.

[7] Minhaj-us Siraj, *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, Eng trans. H.G.Raverty, Vol. II (New Delhi : Oriental, 1970) 1133.

[8] Mohammad Habib, *Introduction to a new edition of Elliot and Dowson's History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. II (Aligarh:Cosmopolitan,1952) 55.

[9] Yusuf Husain, *Glimpses of Medieval Indian Culture* (Bombay:Asia,1959) 135.

[10] See Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui,"Social Mobility in the Delhi Sultanate", in *Medieval India 1 Researches in the History of India 1200-1750*, ed. by Irfan Habib (New Delhi: OUP, 1992) 23.

[11] Irfan Habib, "Economic History of the Delhi Sultanate- An Interpretation", *Indian Historical Review* IV No. 2 (1978): 292.

[12] See Siddiqui, "Social Mobility" 32-33.

introduced new crafts such as carpet weaving, or paper making and also lent fresh dimensions to the existing ones. It is doubtful whether these techniques could have been immediately adopted by Indian artisans, organized in hereditary custom-bound castes and familiar with quite different craft traditions. The extent of 'liberation' of the native artisans as a result of the establishment of the Sultanate should be viewed cautiously. The assumption that Indian artisans embraced Islam in order to live in freedom in the cities, is not supported by conclusive evidence. What seems more plausible is that for the transmission of new techniques, docile, trainable labour was obtained through large scale enslavement.[13]

Slavery, as an institution, existed in India on the eve of Ghorian conquests.[14] With the Ghorian conquests, the plunder of cattle and slaves from unpacified areas was indulged.[15] Slaves continued to be the object of military expeditions after the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate. Sultan Balban obtained slaves in large numbers in the course of his expedition to the *Doab*.[16] Sultan Alauddin Khalji had collected nearly fifty thousand slaves; the number reached one lakh eighty thousand during the reign of Sultan Firuz Tughluq (1351-88). Among Firuz Tughluq's slaves, above twelve thousand became artisans (*kasib*) of various crafts. They were trained in the royal

[13] Irfan Habib, *Economic History* 6-7.
[14] Lallanji Gopal, *Economic Life of Northern India c.A.D. 700-1200* (Banaras : Motilal,1965) 71-80.
[15] Siraj, II 760, 806, 816, 818, 821, 825, 828, 853.
[16] Ziauddin Barani, *Tarikh-i-Firozshahi*, Eng. trans. Elliot and Dowson, Vol. III (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, n.d.) 105.

Karkhanas (stores) with necessary craft skills.[17] Thus, in the early days of the Sultanate, the growth of crafts was made possible by immigration and enslavement. In course of time, as either the descendents of the slaves, converted to Islam, gradually earned freedom and continued in the newly learned professions, or as Indian castes began to take to them by a long process of adjustment, there arose a sufficiently large supply of free skilled labour that could dispense with the demand for slave labour.[18] There was a perceptible decline in slavery after the fourteenth century. Babur in his account of India mentions the large number of artisans and workmen organized in castes, but does not have anything to say about the availability of slaves.[19]

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The accounts of the contemporary chroniclers as well as foreign travellers show that private industries of considerable importance and magnitude were developed during the period of the Delhi Sultans. The important agro and non-agro industrial manufactures were textiles, metal-work, stone-work, leather-work, sugar, indigo and paper. Shihabuddin Umari, the author of *Masalik-ul-Absar* wrote that the Indians had surpassed all the nations in acquiring skill in wonderful crafts.[20] Out of the whole

[17] Shams-i-Siraj Afif, *Tarikh-i-Firozshahi*, Eng. trans. R.C.Jauhri, *Medieval India in Transition–Tarikh-i- Firoz Shahi A First Hand Account* (New Delhi : Sundeep,2001) 158-59.
[18] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I, 92-93.
[19]Zahiruddin Muhammad Babur, *Baburnama*, Eng. trans. A.S.Beveridge, Vol. I&II (1922; New Delhi : Oriental Reprint,1970) 520.
[20] Shihabuddin al-Umari, *Masalik-ul-Absar*, Eng. trans. Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources of Information on the Life and Conditions of the Sultanate of Delhi* (New Delhi : Munshiram,1992) 111.

range of agro-based crafts, the greatest industry was the manufacture of textile of all kinds such as cotton cloth, woollen cloth and silks. Cotton cloth itself was of two kinds–the coarse (*kamin*) and the fine (*mahin*).[21] Cotton cloth of a little superior quality was called calico (*kirpas*) and was widely used. The manufacture of fine cloth (muslin) had attained an unusual degree of excellence and was produced at Sylhet and Dacca in Bengal, and Deogir in the Deccan. About the Deogiri cloth, Amir Khusrau writes, "The fairy-like beauties know that the Deogiri suits their taste better than the fine grey linen (*katan*). It can be likened in delicacy and essence to sunshine or shadow or moonlight!"[22] Fine cloth was also made at Kara and exported to Delhi.[23] Shihabuddin Umari while describing the Indian dress writes:

> Generally prosperous people wear the clothes of fine cotton. They make shirts resembling the short coats of Baghdad from the cotton thread... The Indian cotton cloth is finer, and has more softness and beauty of its look. Some of its kind are like silken muslin on account of their softness, quality and shineness.[24]

The Muhammadan merchant,Sulaiman who made a voyage to India in the beginning of the ninth century wrote that the cotton stuffs were manufactured of such exquisite delicacy that a robe made of it would pass through a signet ring.[25]

Enumerating the presents sent by Muhammad Tughluq

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[21] The coarse cloth was also called *pat* and was worn by the poor and the *faqirs*.
[22] Husain 125.
[23] Battuta 41.
[24] Umari 128.
[25] R.H.Major, ed., *India In The Fifteenth Century*, Hakluyt Society (1857; Delhi : Deep,1974) 28.

to the emperor of China, Ibn Battuta mentions, among other things, 100 pieces of '*bairami*' cloth made of cotton in which beauty had no equal, 100 pieces of silk cloth called *khazz*, the silk of each of them being different from four to five different colours, 100 pieces of the cloth called *salahiya*, 100 pieces of *shirinbaf*, 100 pieces of *shanbaf*, 500 pieces of Kashmir woollen materials of which 100 were black, 100 were white, 100 red, 100 blue, 100 pieces of green linen[26] (besides) 100 pieces of wrapper, ten embroidered robes of honour of royal type and ten caps from those of the Sultan himself, one of them being studded with pearls.[27]Of the five varieties of cloth to which Ibn Battuta gives names, four varieties can be identified as fine cottons or muslins namely *bairami*, *salahiya* (elsewhere *silahati*), *shirinbaf* and *shanbaf*. Battuta praises *bairami* (*bhairon*) as a fine cotton cloth but subsequently it was applied to an inferior variety. Similarly *silahati* which was costly under the Delhi Sultans, was under Akbar (1556-1605) selling at the lowest rate of 2 to 4 *dams* per yard.[28] However, it is certain that Indian manufactures of luxury textiles had acquired a somewhat high level in the manufacturing world of the Sultans of Delhi.[29] Battuta also mentions that it was a custom in India to cover mattresses and blankets (made of silk) with white sheets of linen or cotton so that when the covers became dirty, they could be washed and the inner parts kept

[26] Afif mentions that the price of cloth, whether white linen or soft linen was very low during the reign of Firuz Tughluq. See Afif, trans. Jauhri,170.
[27] Battuta 151.
[28]Abul Fazl Allami, *Ain-i-Akbari*, Eng. trans. H. Blochmann, ed. D.C. Phillott, Vol. I (Delhi : New Taj Office, 1989 reprint) 101.
[29] Hamida Khatoon Naqvi, *Agricultural, Industrial and Urban Dynamism Under the Sultans of Delhi* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1986) 45.

safe.[30]

Though prohibited by Islamic law for men's wear,[31] silken stuffs were nevertheless used by the affluent people and by the poorer classes on special occasions. Silk was imported from Bengal where silk worms were reared.[32] The Chinese writer, Ma Huan, writing about Bengal in the middle of the fifteenth century, says, "Mulberry trees, wild mulberry tree, silkworms and cocoons, all these they have."[33] Mirza Haidar Dughlat in the *Tarikh-i-Rashidi* completed in 1547 mentions that among the wonders of Kashmir were the quantities of mulberry trees cultivated for their leaves, from which silk was obtained.[34] However, a greater supply of silk yarn was imported from Persia, Arabia, Khurasan, Turkey and China.[35]

On the basis of contemporary indigenous sources, Moti Chandra gives the names of various Indian varieties of silken stuffs. For example, red silk was renamed *rattansuy apara hana*, white Chinese silk was called *adhichina* while woven silk was called *dukula*.[36] Under the Delhi Sultans, the production of silken stuffs increased. In the *Risail-ul Ijaz* of Amir Khusrau, there are

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[30] Battuta 120.

[31] Firuz Shah, *Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi*, Eng. trans. Azra Alavi (Delhi : IAD, 1996) 28.

[32] After the fourteenth century Bengal villages became centres for the rearing of the mulberry silkworm. S.A.A. Rizvi, *The Wonder That Was India*, Vol. II (Calcutta : Rupa, 1993 reprint) 207.

[33] Ma Huan, *Ying-yai Sheng lan* 1433, Eng. trans. J.V.G. Mills, *The Over-All Survey of the Ocean's Shores* (Cambridge : Hakluyt, 1970) 163.

[34] Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat, *Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, Eng. trans. N.Elias and E.Denison Ross, *A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia* (Patna : Academica Asiatica, 1973) 424-25.

[35] Duarte Barbosa, *The Book of Duarte Barbosa*, Eng. trans. Longworth Dames, Vol. I (London : Hakluyt, 1967 reprint) 193.

[36] Moti Chandra,"Indian Costumes and Textiles from the 8th to the 12th Century", *Journal of Indian Textile History* V (1960) : 11-16.

references to *kirpas* (long cloth), *Khaz* (coarse kind of silk cloth), *Deba* (brocade), *Atlas* (satin), *Qaqam* (fine kind of ermin), *Nasij* (garments of fine silken texture), *Qimat-i-Hariri* (very thin silken cloth).Other cloths worth mentioning are *Yakta-i-Chambharatali* (a kind of very thin cloth), *Yakta-i-Parnian* (kind of fine silken painted silk), *Yakta-i-Awadhi*, *Jama-i-Deogiri*, *Yakta-i-Narma Latifi* (a kind of fine cloth of delicate texture), *Jerma*, *Mauji* (a fine piece of cloth), *Yakta-i-Bahraman* (red coloured silken cloth).[37] There was much use of silk cloth and of cotton and silk mixed, such as *Mashru* at Delhi and its neighbourhood. When Timur sacked Delhi, he collected among other things silks and brocades of great value.[38] In India silk was frequently rewoven with cotton and these admixtures gained greater currency in the Sultanate. *Mashru* was a double-layered material with a thick cotton base and was covered on the surface with almost a single stranded silken warp and woof, which infact was a purely Indian innovation.[39] Silk weaving was taken to its finest level in Gujarat where the *patolas* with many fancy designs were highly valued.[40] Indian silk, especially from Deogir, was of the highest quality and it is difficult to imagine that it was woven by workers to whom a proper status was denied.[41] Barani especially mentions *patola* fabrics among Alauddin Khalji's enormous spoils from Deogir.

[37] S.H. Askari, *Amir Khusrau As A Historian, Collected Works of Prof.S.H Askari, Vol. II* (Patna : Khuda Bakhsh Library, 1992) 102.
[38] Timur, *Malfuzat-i Timuri or Tuzak-i-Timuri*, Eng. Trans. Elliot and Dowson, Vol. III (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, n.d.) 446.
[39] Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 56.
[40] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 79.
[41] Mohammad Habib, *Introduction* 54.

The Muslims had a lot to contribute in the manufacture of woollen cloth also.[42] Wool was procured from the mountainous tracts, though sheep were also reared in the plains. The finer qualities of woollen cloth and furs were largely imported from outside, and were almost exclusively worn by the nobles. Umari mentions that the cloth for winter garments was imported mostly from Alexandria while those of the summer were made of cloth imported from China and Iraq.[43] The imported woollen cloth fetched high profit. Loose coats made of red fur like the villagers of Arabia were also worn.[44] No courtier was allowed to attend the court without his headgear i.e. woollen cap.[45] However, the shawl industry of Kashmir was well established.[46] Muhammad Tughluq sent Kashmir shawls as a present to the Chinese emperor.[47]

The art of embroidery was also well developed. Gujarat was famous for its gold and silver embroidery, generally on silk cloth.[48] Umari mentions that the people of India wore costly clothes embroidered with gold on Fridays. Some of them wore brocades embroidered on the sleeves, others put embroidery only on the shoulders. Generally the saddles were covered with cloth embroidered in silver or decked with silver ornaments.[49] In

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[42] Mohammad Habib, *Introduction* 48.
[43] Umari 118-19.
[44] Umari 134.
[45] Afif, trans. Jauhri 163.
[46] Moti Chandra 7-8.
[47] Battuta 151.
[48] Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo* (The Broadway Travellers), ed. by Sir E.Denison Ross and Eileen Power, Eng. trans. from the text of L.F.Benedetto by Prof. Aldo Ricci (London : Routledge, 1931) 332-33.
[49] Umari 128,134.

Amir Khusrau's works we get references to fine painted (*Munaqqash*) or embroidered (*Zarkar*) garments.[50]

In the manufacture and export of textile goods Bengal and Gujarat enjoyed primacy. The harbour facilities that they enjoyed as well as their commercial relations with other countries enabled them to build a textile industry of a vast magnitude. Mahuan, Varthema[51] and Barbosa provide adequate evidence on the abundance, variety and high quality of the Bengal textiles particularly cotton cloth, muslins, gold embroidered caps and silk handkerchiefs. Ma Huan mentions five or six varieties of fine stuffs made in Bengal and gives their names.[52] We learn from Barbosa that the Bengal cloths on account of their quality found a good market in the two great international ports of South Asia at that time, Malacca and Ormuz.[53] Gujarat also made considerable progress in the manufacture of cloth. According to Barbosa, the great city of Cambay contained skilled craftsmen of many kinds 'as in Flanders'. It was an important centre of manufacture for coarse and fine varieties of woven white cotton fabrics, printed cotton stuffs, silk cloth, coloured velvets, velvety satins, thick carpets, beautiful quilts, finely worked and painted testers of beds, quilted articles of clothing etc. Moreover, coloured and richly embroidered silk along with cotton cloths were manufactured at

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[50] Askari 102.
[51] Ludovic de Varthema, *Travels in Egypt, Syria, Persia, India, Ethiopia*, ed. G.P.Badger, trans. J.W.James (London : Hakluyt, 1863) 212.
[52] Ma Huan 162-3.
[53] Barbosa Vol. II 145.

the sea-port of Patenexy which may be identified with Veraval-Somnath.[54] The Russian traveller Nikitin (1468-1471) found Cambay to be a manufacturing place for every sort of goods as *talach* (long gowns, half cotton half silk), damask, *khan* (a sort of satin from China) and *kiota* (blankets).[55]

The textile technology witnessed a series of improvements and introductions of various devices, which can be ascribed to the period of the Sultanate. The spinning wheel (*charkha*), almost certainly and the cotton-cleaners bow, very probably, are devices imported into India during the Sultanate period.[56] It was chiefly in respect of the cash crops that the existing techniques and conditions of transport made it necessary for certain manufacturing processes to be carried out before the produce left the hands of the peasant or, at least, the precincts of the village.[57] Firstly, the seed was separated from the cotton by the Indian gin (*charkhi*) which consisted of two rollers geared to each other so as to move in opposite directions when one of them was turned by its handle.[58] After the cotton had been ginned, it was cleaned or carded.[59] One of the most primitive methods for achieving this was beating the cotton with stick but it had its own hazards. Instead of loosening it might break the fibres.

[54] Barbosa, Vol. I 141-42; Vol. II 154.
[55] Athanasius Nikitin, *Voyage to India*, trans. Count Wielhorsky, in R.H. Major, ed., *India In The Fifteenth Century*, Hakluyt Society (1857; Delhi : Deep, 1974) 19.
[56] Irfan Habib, "Technological Changes and Society : 13th and 14th Centuries", Presidential Address, Section II, *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* Varanasi (1969) : 147.
[57] Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi : OUP, 2000) 63.
[58] Irfan Habib,"Technological Changes and Society" 144.
[59] i.e. the fibres were separated.

Therefore the bow-string device was much better.[60] It is quite possible that the bow string device for carding cotton was generalized in India in the 11th century, that is, about the same time as the Persian poet, Asiruddin Akhsikati (11th century) explicitly recalled the device when describing the horizon as the bow and the clouds as the cotton.[61] Thus, this instrument must have reached India just on the eve of the Ghorian conquests. The bow-string device further cleared the cotton of lingering dirt, thus opening up the knots and transforming it into downy fleece called *gala* in the vernacular.[62]

The next important process was the spinning of yarn. This was done with the spindle (*duk*) prior to the introduction of the spinning wheel. The *Bahar-i-Ajam* explains *duk* (spindle) as a long (*mustatil*) wood under which another wood is attached and that iron or wood is rotated by both hands, so that short (*khwurd*) silk or wool is twisted (*tafta bashad*).[63]

The spinning wheel came to India only with the Ghorian conquerors in the 13th-14th centuries. There is no evidence for wheel-spinning in ancient India. Lynn White was the first to notice the absence of spinning wheel in ancient India and it is now certain that it originated in China, where it is illustrated as early as 1035. From China, the spinning wheel probably arrived in Central Asia and Iran and thus came to India

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60 Ishrat Alam,"Textile Tools as Depicted in Ajanta and Mughal Paintings", in G.Kuppuram and K.Kummdamani, ed., *History of Science and Technology in India*, Vol. II (New Delhi, 1990) 101-2.

61 Irfan Habib, "Changes in Technology in Medieval India", *Studies in History* Vol. II No.1 (1980) : 17.

62 Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 46.

63 Alam 104.

with the Muslims.[64] Its earliest reference in India is in the middle of the fourteenth century in the verses of Isami (1350) who speaks of the resentment of the officers of Sultan Razia (1236-40) against her in the following words:

> That woman alone is good, who works all the time with the *charkha* (spinning wheel); for a seat of honour would deprive her of reason.
>
> Let cotton (*panba*) be the woman's companion, grief her wine-cup, and the twang of the spindle (*duk*) will serve well for her minstrel.[65]

The introduction of the spinning wheel enhanced productivity immensely since it led to a six fold increase in the output in comparison with a spinner working with a hand spindle.[66]

Spinning was generally done by women and was considered to be an honourable pastime.[67] Amir Khusrau exhorted his daughter never to give up her work at the spinning wheel and never to forsake the women's spindle (*duk*) and the needle (*suzan*).[68] The spinning and the carding bow on account of their labour-saving capacity, must have substantially cheapened spun yarn, and probably greatly enlarged its production.

The process of weaving consists of interlacing at right angles the two series of threads, the warp and the weft; the instrument by which this was done was the loom.[69] The addition of pedals or treadles to the loom to control the heddle-harness,

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[64] Irfan Habib,"Changes in Technology" 21.
[65] Irfan Habib,"Technological Changes and Society" 142.
[66] R.J.Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology*, Vol. IV (Leiden : Brill, 1956) 156.
[67] Askari 62.
[68] Askari 35.
[69] Alam 108.

are thought to be a late addition.[70] The description of parts of the loom in Sanskrit lexicons does not indicate that treadles existed in ancient India.[71] The introduction of the treadle would have radically increased the speed of weaving. The weaver, placing his feet in the treadle (*paichah*) moved the warp and weft by the motion of his feet, the disengaged hands being left free for other operations such as to manipulate the shuttle. Simultaneous use of both the limbs, hand and feet, must have resulted in augmenting the weavers' per hour output.[72] Amir Khusrau refers to the weaver's workplace known as *kargah* which had a hollow in the ground in which his feet worked moving from side to side or in and out. He also refers to *masura* or the reed used by weavers to wind their thread upon and *minwal* or the beam or wooden stick of weaver's loom on which he rolled, twisted and turned the cloth.[73] The first firm evidence for the use of treadles in India comes in 1469 in an illustration depicting treadles in the *Miftah-ul Fuzala*.[74] It defines *lauh pay* (foot-board) as the wooden strip which the weaver keeps under his feet while weaving cloth.[75] Quite possibly the treadles came to India simultaneously with the spinning wheel as an appendage of the invaders but this remains a matter of speculation. The spinning wheel led to enhanced productivity and the introduction of weaver's treadle as a subsequent phenomenon must have increased the production of

[70] Irfan Habib,"Technology and Barriers to Social Change in Mughal India", *The Indian Historical Review* V 1-2 (1978-79) : 164.
[71] See Moti Chandra 24-25 for description of parts of the weaver's looms.
[72] Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 47-48.
[73] Askari 33.
[74] a dictionary written in 1468-69.
[75] Alam 108.

cloth considerably during the Sultanate period.

The dyeing industry and calico-painting went hand in hand with the manufacture of cloth.[76] The art of dyeing was well established since ancient times and during the Sultanate period, the tradition not only continued but was evidently amplified by the addition in the number of compounded shades.[77] Indigo and other vegetable dyes were responsible for the bright colours worn by men and women. A tax called *nilgiri* was imposed on the manufacture of indigo.[78] Barbosa also refers to coloured silk and cotton cloths as well as finely worked and painted quilts and testers of beds.[79] There is no definite information about calico-printing before the sixteenth century. Moti Chandra finds the words *chhimpaka* and *chhipa* in the 14th and 15th century sources which might respectively mean female and male printer.[80] However, Moti Chandra's supposition is not very convincing and there is no reference to cloth-printing in the Persian sources of the Sultanate period.[81]

Another important village industry was the manufacture of sugar. Sugarcane was cultivated in different parts of Northern India for production of sugar. The ripe sugarcanes were pressed and crushed in sugar mills called '*Gharkh*' and '*Jawaz*' and revenue accrued to the government from the tax on

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[76] K.M.Ashraf, *Life and Conditions of the People of Hindustan* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1970) 129.
[77] Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 48-49.
[78] *Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi* 10,22.
[79] Barbosa, Vol. I 141-42.
[80] Moti Chandra, "Costumes and Textiles in the Sultanate Period", *Journal of Indian Textile History*, VI (1961) : 17, 40.
[81] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. 1 80.

its juice (*Wajah-i-asri*).[82] There were several varieties of sugar such as soft sugar (*khand*) and the crystallized white *qand*. Unrefined sugar (*gur*) was in wide use among the poorer classes. Bengal produced sugar for internal consumption as also for export.[83] Sugarcane juice was also used for the manufacture of wine.[84] The extraction of oil from the oilseeds also used to take place within the village through the familiar process of the oil-press (*ghan*). The oilmen formed an important industrial class and a tax, *roghan gari* was imposed on the making of oil.[85] Another notable development in the sphere of agricultural manufactures was the arrival of the West Asian liquor still, which provided a better means of distillation than the so-called Gandhara stills in which the vapours were cooled only in the receiver.[86]

The medieval method of craft production involved neither subtle skill nor any outlay in equipment for installing any industrial unit. In the rural areas cottage industries supplemented agriculture. These were organized on a caste basis except in the case of Muslim craftsmen. Babur found all craftsmen organized in rigid and exclusive castes.[87] There were no factories or big establishments for organized production. Actual producers usually lived in small towns or in big villages with transport

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82 Askari 104.
83 Ashraf 134.
84 Askari 105.
85 Jamini Mohan Banerjee, *History of Firuz Shah Tughluq* (Delhi : Munshiram, 1967) 123.
86 Irfan Habib, *Economic History* 13. It added a new and admittedly widespread agricultural industry.
87 Babur 520.

facilities. They disposed of their stock in local fairs[88] or sold it to merchants who arranged distribution inland or export outside the country.[89]

The luxury items were generally produced in the royal workshops or *karkhanas*. The system of royal *karkhanas* was probably borrowed from Persia though its much earlier existence in India could not be ruled out.[90] In Muhammad Tughluq's *karkhanas*, four thousand silk workers were employed who wove and embroidered different types of robes of honour and garments.[91] Firuz Tughluq surpassed his predecessors in maintaining large *karkhanas* in Delhi numbering thirty six in all, for which he worked hard to have raw materials collected.[92] Grains and other goods were purchased for the royal *karkhanas* and following just and equitable laws, suitable price was paid in full.[93]

II

A consideration of the extent and organization of the market for agricultural produce is naturally essential to any serious study of an agrarian economy. There was a large volume of internal trade under the Delhi Sultans. The high level of agrarian taxation and the cash nexus in combination ensured that the peasants would have to sell much of their produce in order to

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[88] Husain 137.
[89] Ashraf 125.
[90] Tripta Verma, *Karkhanas Under The Mughals From Akbar to Aurangzeb : A Study in Economic Development* (Delhi : Pragati, 1994) 7.
[91] Umari 118-19.
[92] Afif, trans. Jauhri 191-93.
[93] Afif trans. Jauhri 75.

pay the land revenue.[94] Local trade involved the sale of crops for the payment of land-revenue and to feed the towns which were growing in size and number. The *mandis* in big villages served as the base, and Delhi and the provincial capitals were the focal points. Bigger deals in commodities were made in special market towns or *mandis* which also served as convenient media of exchange for the surplus of corn or goods produced in the vicinity.[95] Ibn Battuta's Indian itinerary brought him to towns and cities with large markets and he described the market at Delhi as the largest in the world.[96] The city of Delhi had a large number of inns, for all kinds of merchants and travellers,[97] and some 10,000 to 20,000 load-cattle were used by the Hindu *Naiks* to supply provisions to the city.[98]

Grain was not transported on bullock carts, but on the backs of the bullocks. Afif mentions that traders brought grain, salt, sugar or other goods into Delhi laden upon bullocks.[99] Ibn Battuta refers to thirty thousand *maunds* of grain being transported from Amroha to Delhi on the backs of three thousand bullocks. He also adds that this was the usual mode of transport for goods in bulk.[100] The merchants who specialized in transporting grain were known as *karwaniyan*[101] and they moved

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94 *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 83.
95 Ashraf 137. The *mandis* were supplemented by local fairs.
96 Battuta 28.
97 Shams-i-Siraj Afif, *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*, Eng. trans. Elliot and Dowson, *History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. III (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, n.d.) 303; trans. Jauhri 96.
98 Mohammad Habib, *Introduction* 63.
99 Afif, trans. Elliot and Dowson 363.
100 Battuta 146.
101 Or *karavanis*, a Persian term. See Barani, *Tarikh* 193.

with their families along with thousands of bullocks. These transporters on land, of goods of bulk like foodgrains, sugar, butter and salt came to be called *banjaras* during the Mughal times.[102] They usually moved in caravans for the sake of safety because roads were unsafe on account of both wild animals and dacoits.[103] The Sultanate created conditions favourable for commerce. The Delhi Sultans paid particular attention to the protection and safety of roads and caravan routes. Awfi, the author of *Jawami-ul-Hikayat* gives credit to Sultan Iltutmish and his *Wazir* for taking effective measures for the suppression of dacoits due to which the merchants (*bazargan*) could travel without fear.[104] Barani mentions that during the reign of Sultan Balban, the roads to Hindustan were cleared so that caravans and merchants could pass.[105] Muhammad bin Tughluq tried to improve road communication by building the road from Delhi to Daulatabad. Trees were planted on both sides of the road, there were three postal stations at every mile, *sarais* were built for the needs of the traveller.[106] Umari writes that the inns where the travellers stayed were placed at a distance of four bow-shots. There were tanks for supplying water and *bazars* for purchasing food and fodder.[107]

Inland trade, particularly grain trade, was in the hands of a heterogeneous community of merchants, predominantly

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102 Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System* 69.
103 Askari 78-79.
104 Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources* 31.
105 Barani, *Tarikh* 105.
106 Battuta 44. Battuta says that it gave the appearance of a market of forty days' journey.
107 Umari 132.

Hindu. There were specific designations for merchants to indicate their several specialized functions like *Karwaniyan*, *Baqqalan*, *Sahan*, *Muhtikaran*, *Multaniyan*, *Dallalan*, *Kisahdaran*, *Sarrafan* etc. *Baqqal* is a term frequently used by Muslim writers in India for members of the *bania* class in general.[108] Grain dealing became almost exclusively a non-Muslim concern in the Sultanate.[109] These Hindu grain dealers were known as *baqqals* or *baniyas*.[110] The word *sah* means wealthy merchant and the *sahs* were the traditional Hindu bankers and moneylenders.[111] Barani refers to *Multanis* in conjunction with *sahs* i.e. *Multaniyan wa Sahan*[112] which suggests that they were Hindus who were professionally engaged in usury and commerce. It is possible that some of the *Multanis* were Muslims since one of them, Qazi Hamiduddin is called *Multani bachcha* and he attained the status of *malik-ut-tujjar*, merchant prince, the chief trader.[113] All sorts of people wanted loans, including the members of the ruling class, who either because of the seasonal variations in the income from their revenue assignments or simply out of improvidence, borrowed heavily from the *Multanis* and *Sahs*.[114] Even in the wake of Alauddin Khalji's economic reforms, the *Multanis* and *Sahs* could still be numbered among the Sultan's wealthiest and most

[108] S.H.Hodivala, *Studies in Indo Muslim History* Vol. I (Bombay : Popular, 1939) 672.
[109] Some Muslim *baqqals* do appear in the sources from time to time.
[110] Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 147.
[111] Hodivala, Vol. I 207.-
[112] Hodivala, Vol. I 206-7.
[113] Rizvi 226.
[114] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 85-86.

important subjects.[115]

According to K.M.Ashraf, the interest charged on loans was ten percent per annum for big loans, and twenty percent for small or petty sums.[116] *Sarrafan* were goldsmiths who were also money lenders and money changers.[117] *Kisahdaran* were probably money lenders and merchants engaged in horse trade. *Muhtakir* literally means hoarder and regrator.[118] Regrating or *ihtekar* in essential articles, such as foodgrains, was strictly prohibited. Amir Khusrau refers to the practice of hoarding in the *Risail-ul Ijaz* as:

> There is the pretence of keeping stocks of grains against scarcity (*ambardari*) but there exists everywhere plenty of cereals like *Mung* (pulse black grain) and *Maash* (vetch or kidney bean) which are not drawn together (do not get mixed up). They have imitated the ways of the jews. Is there nobody to throw them (hoarders) in the pit in place of grains.[119]

Mahru also refers to the practice of hoarding and profiteering by the greedy merchants of Multan inspite of threats of punishment.[120] A group of people who first appear in this period are the *dallals* or brokers.[121] The brokers acted as intermediaries between the buyers and sellers and charged commission from both parties. They were an organised and

[115] Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate A Political and Military History* (Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 1999) 279.
[116] Ashraf 140.
[117] Y.M.Siddiqui, "The Merchants and the Delhi Sultanate (13th and 14th Centuries)", *Indian History Congress* Aligarh (1975) : fn 11.
[118] Ziauddin Barani, *Fatawa-i-Jahandari*, Eng. trans. Mohammad Habib and Afsar Salim Khan, *The Political History of the Delhi Sultanate* (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, n.d.) 37.
[119] Askari 104.
[120] Ainuddin Abdullah bin Mahru, *Insha-i-Mahru*, partial Eng. trans. Shaikh Abdur Rashid (Lahore, 1965) 22.
[121] A.J.Qaisar feels the institution was an importation. See A.J.Qaisar, "The Role of Brokers in Medieval India", *Indian Historical Review* Vol. I No.2 (1974) : 220-22.

disciplined body who all worked under an effective head.[122] A tax called *Dalalat-e-Bazarha* was levied on the brokers which was remitted during the time of Firuz Shah.[123]

The Hindu merchants had apparently organised themselves into a corporation, *Yak jihat*.[124] Through this corporation, transport merchants collaborated with the market merchants, and controlled the prices of essential commodities like grain, not allowing prices to fall even in times of abundance.[125] Since foodgrains, textiles and horses belonged to the category of essential commodities, trade in any of these was governed by a uniform and well enunciated set of laws. As far as mercantile taxation is concerned, Firuz Shah's *Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi* mentions twenty six cesses out of which as many as nineteen were extracted from merchants.[126] Firuz Shah abolished these illegal cesses which obviously had existed and been realized earlier. *Zakat* was the tax imposed on the movement of articles of trade from one place to another. The sanctioned rate was 1/40th of the value of the merchandise which was doubled in the case of non-Muslim traders.[127] It appears, however, that the Sultanate government charged 1/25th of the value of merchandise

[122] See Qaisar 220-22.
[123] *Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi*, 9, 22.
[124] Barani, *Fatawa* 37.
[125] Barani, *Fatawa* 37.
[126] *Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi* 9-12, 22.
[127] N.P.Aghnides, *Muhammadan Theories of Finance* (New York : Columbia University, 1916) 318; Technically *Zakat* is defined as "the giving (*tamlik*), as an act of piety, of a legally (*shara*) stated portion of one's property to a poor Muslim who is not of Hashim family or their clients (*mawala*) in such a way as to preclude for the giver any benefit." Aghnides 206.It was thus a religious cum property tax. *Zakat* in India ceased to be a religious tax imposed on the Muslims only and was realised in the form of impost and octroi duties also.

as duty on all imports and on every horse a tax of seven *dinars* was levied. Battuta affirms that the import duty was later reduced by Muhammad bin Tughluq to the legal ratio.[128] Some Sultans were not content with this tax and levied a cess called *danganah*,[129] which is mentioned among the taxes abolished by Firuz Shah. Merchandise that had paid the regular *zakat*, after being passed, was carried to another warehouse called *zariba*, where it was weighed again. A fresh tax of a *dang*[130] on every *tanka* of their assessed value was levied.[131] Afif mentions another tax on traders, namely *Rozi* or *Rori*,[132] which was abolished by Firuz Shah. It was not a tax in the strict sense of the term, but a forced labour extorted from the merchants who brought grain, salt, sugar or other goods into Delhi, laden upon bullocks. These traders were compelled to give their animals for a day to carry bricks from Delhi to the city of Firuzabad. On account of this practice most of the traders avoided coming to Delhi and thus, caused shortage of salt, sugar etc.[133] It seems that the taxes levied on the mercantile community were well within their means, for throughout the Sultanate period, trade was regarded as a profitable occupation.[134]

Regarding the agricultural commodities that entered trade, our information is sketchy and incomplete. Brisk inland

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[128] Battuta 12.
[129] Mahru 20,44.
[130] 4dangs = 1 *jital*; 48*jitals*=1silver *tanka*.
[131] Afif, trans. Elliot and Dowson 363.
[132] Elliot and Dowson read it as '*Rozi*' meaning one day's labour while Hodivala interprets it as '*Rori*' or broken bricks.
[133] Afif trans. Elliot and Dowson 364.
[134] Afif, trans. Jauhri 75,115.

trade was carried on in commodities like rice, wheat, sugar, *ghi*, betel leaves, cloth (especially muslin), wines etc. Delhi and other provincial capitals were the focus of the internal trade of their respective territories. The city of Sarsuti produced a great quantity of fine rice which was exported to Delhi.[135] Delhi also obtained foodgrains from as far as Amroha, sugar from Kanauj, excellent wheat from Marh and betel leaf from Dhar.[136] Amir Khusrau refers to a caravan carrying loads of betel leaves proceeding from Gujarat towards Delhi and another one carrying cloves and saffron leaves, proceeding from Bihar towards Agra.[137] The trade in textile goods i.e. muslin from Bengal and Deogir, and fine textiles from Gujarat, has already been referred to. Shawls and carpets from Kashmir were in demand at Delhi. The introduction of the Iranian vertical loom into Kashmir and elsewhere in the fourteenth century stepped up both the quality and quantity of carpet production.[138] Regarding foreign trade, the principal centre for overland trade from India was Multan. Silk was a profitable item of import while indigo, which Iran imported from India, must have been sent out by this route.[139] Overland trade concentrated on commodities which were light in weight but high in value because of the high cost of transportation. In the case of sea-borne trade, the chief articles of import were the luxury articles like silk, velvet etc. Thus,

[135] Battuta 23.
[136] Battuta 146, 159, 161, 167. Battuta mentions that the grains of wheat at Marh were long, deep yellow and thick, the likes of which he saw nowhere except in China.
[137] Askari 78-79.
[138] Rizvi 211.
[139] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 84.

brocade and silk stuffs were imported from China, Iraq and Alexandria under Muhammad Tughluq.[140] The exports of India consisted of a variety of indigenous products, especially grain and cotton cloth. Some countries round the Persian Gulf were dependent on India for their entire food supply.[141] The chief ports for export trade were Gujarat and Bengal. The principal exports of Gujarat consisted of precious stones, pepper, ginger, indigo, cotton and linen fabrics.[142] Among the exports of Bengal, Barbosa mentions the famous muslins of Bengal along with good white cane-sugar.[143]

III

A study of the agricultural prices prevalent under the Delhi Sultans is an important aspect of the agrarian system. Barani's long account of the price-control measures of Sultan Alauddin Khalji gives us important price data relating to his reign. Some assessments of this account have not been very complimentary to historian. However, Barani is not our only source on the subject of price control. Other sources like Amir Khusrau's *Khazain-ul-Futuh*, Ibn Battuta's *Rehla*, Isami's *Futuh-us-Salatin* have also given accounts of the price control measures[144] but all sources, with the exception of Barani attribute the measure to the benevolence of the Sultan. According to Amir

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[140] Umari 118.
[141] Ashraf 144.
[142] Polo 332-33.
[143] Barbosa, Vol. II 146.
[144] Other contemporary writers give only confirmatory evidence. Barani alone provides a detailed analysis.

Khusrau:

> As this cloud of generosity is extremely anxious for the public welfare and the comfort and prosperity of nobles and commons, he has kept low the price of grain, from which villagers and citizens derive an equal advantage, during periods when not a drop of rain has fallen from the painted clouds. Whenever the white clouds have had no water left and destruction has stared people in the face, he has cheapened the price of grain for every section of the public by generously opening the royal stores.[145]

Ibn Battuta noted that "He was one of the best Sultans and the people of Hind praise him highly."[146] *Shaikh* Nasiruddin Chirag, the *Chishti* mystic recounted how Sultan Alauddin was anxious to reduce the price of grain so that the benefit would accrue to all the people.[147]

Barani, however, was aware that the price-control measures were not a universal boon and he doubted if the motives in introducing them were purely philanthropic in the way every other contemporary commentator, without exception has supposed.[148] Barani thought that the price-regulations came as a solution to a critical financial problem. This problem was caused due to the continuous stream of Mongol invasions,[149] which awakened Alauddin to the urgent necessity of organising frontier defence, a task which had hitherto been neglected by

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[145] Amir Khusrau, *Khazainul Futuh*, Eng. trans. Mohammad Habib, *The Campaigns of Alauddin Khalji* in K.A.Nizami, ed., *Politics and Society During the Early Medieval Period* (Aligarh : PPH, 1981) 157-58.

[146] Battuta 41.

[147] Habib and Nizami 374-75.

[148] Irfan Habib, "The Price Regulations of Alauddin Khalji – A Defence of Zia Barani", in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ed., *Money and Market in India 1100-1700* (Delhi : OUP, 1998) 106.

[149] In the Mongol invasion of 1303 under Targhi, the kingdom was in imminent danger and Alauddin had a narrow escape.

him.[150] Comprehensive measures were undertaken for the defence of the empire. A fortified wall had to be built around Delhi; the old and ruined forts along the route of the invasions had to be restored; and at several forces new forts had to be erected. All forts had to be held by able commanders, provided with ballistas and military stores, and stocked with grain. Large armies had to be stationed at Samana and Dipalpur. Above all, the need of the hour was to recruit a permanent army "not only large, but choice, well armed, with archers, and all ready for immediate service."[151] All this entailed a vast amount of expenditure. According to Barani, these troopers needed to be paid such large amounts every year, which, if paid, would exhaust the treasury within five or six years.[152] Thus, Alauddin determined on his famous policy of reduction and control of prices, so that the resources of the kingdom might be able to bear the expenditure deemed to be necessary for its security.[153]

If the troops were to be employed within the existing resources of the state, no more than two hundred and thirty four *tankas*[154] could be paid as annual salary (*mawajib*) to the *murattab* or the fully equipped soldier. The *murattab* was expected to bring two horses along with all that he needed in the shape of tents, draught animals, slaves etc. Seventy eight *tankas*

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150 R.C.Majumdar, ed., *History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. VI (Bombay : Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, 1960) 27.
151 Barani, *Tarikh* 191.
152 Barani, *Tarikh* 191.
153 W.H.Moreland, *The Agrarian System of Moslem India* (1929; New Delhi : Atlantic, 1994) 36.
154 A *tanka* of silver was one *tola* in weight.

was proposed as the annual salary for the *do-aspa*, or horseman with a remount, who was provided all the equipment plus a good horse by the state.[155]

Alauddin's 'sagacious advisers' argued that in case 'the necessaries of life could be bought at a low rate', it would be possible 'to maintain a large and permanent army' upon the scales of pay as fixed by the Sultan. They further explained that 'the necessaries of life would never become cheap until the price of grain was fixed by regulations and tariffs'.[156] The regulations (*zawabit*) enforcing price control have been summarised by Moreland as: "control of supplies and control of transport, with rationing of consumption when necessary, the whole system resting on a highly-organised intelligence and drastic punishment of evasions."[157] These regulations reveal the working of the price policy.

There was a separate set of regulations governing the grain market,[158] and another governing the price of commodities to be sold in the *Sarai Adl*, which was the market for cloth and groceries. The third set of regulations dealt with the horse, slave and cattle markets and yet another set of regulations dealt with the general markets for all other commodities. The prices were not fixed in an arbitrary manner. Barani says in his *Fatawa-i-Jahandari* : "The King should settle before his own throne the prices of all things according to the principle of production-cost

[155] Irfan Habib, "Price Regulations" 108.
[156] Barani, *Tarikh* 192.
[157] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 36.
[158] or *Mandi*, dealing with corn and cereals.

(*bar award*)."[159]

The basic factor was the fixation of the price of grain which naturally influenced the prices of other commodities in an essentially agricultural society. There were eight regulations for the grain market. The first regulation fixed the prices of all varieties of grain. Barani, in his *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* supplies us with the following list:

Table 1[160]

Type of Cereal	Weight	Price
1. Wheat	Per *man*	7½ *jitals*
2 .Barley	"	4 *jitals*
3. Rice	"	5 *jitals*
4. *Mash* (pulses)	"	5 *jitals*
5. *Nukhud* (gram)	"	5 *jitals*
6. *Moth*	"	3 *jitals*

The second regulation was about the appointment of *Malik* Qabul Ulugh Khani as the controller (*shahna*) of the grain market.[161] He had an assistant controller and an intelligence officer (*barid*). Alauddin seems to have fully recognised that the stability of prices depended on adequate supply and to ensure it he took a number of measures.[162] The third regulation provided for the collection of grain in the royal stores. The Sultan ordered that the whole of the *kharaj* of the *khalisa* villages of the *Doab*

159 Barani, *Fatawa* 35.
160 The *Alai man* consisted of 40 seers and a seer was 24 *tolas* in weight. The *jital* was a copper coin. According to Ferishta, a silver *tanka* was equal to 50 *jitals*. Nelson Wright is inclined to the view that one silver *tanka* was equivalent to 48 *jitals* which is reinforced by Simon Digby's researches. The *Alai tanka* was equal to one *tola* of minted gold or silver.
161 Barani, *Tarikh* 193.
162 U.N.Day, *Some Aspects of Medieval Indian History* (New Delhi : Kumar, 1971) 77.

should be demanded in kind and taken to the royal stores in the city. In Chhain[163] or Jhain (*Shahr-i Nau*) and its districts, half of the Sultan's share should be demanded in kind. The grain so collected should be stored in Jhain and then sent to Delhi through the grain carriers (*karvanis*). By this method substantial quantities of grain reached Delhi. Grain became so plentiful in Delhi and its environs that even in times of drought no scarcity was felt.[164] The fourth regulation brought all grain carriers of the kingdom into a single corporation (*yak wujud*) under the charge of *shahna i mandi*. The leaders of the *karvanis* were brought in chains before the *shahna* and kept in confinement, until they did not as one body accept the conditions imposed upon them and give sureties for each other. They were ordered to settle on the banks of the Jamuna with their wives, children, goods and cattle.[165] As a result, "so much grain found its way into the markets that," in normal times "it was unnecessary to open the royal stores."[166] The fifth regulation provided for securing the cheapness of grain against regrating (*ihtikar*). This rule was enforced so rigidly that no corn-dealer, farmer or anyone else "could hold back secretly a *man* or half a *man* of grain" and sell it for a *dang* or a *diram* above the fixed price. The regrated grain, if discovered, was forfeited to the state and the regrator was fined.[167]

[163] For the identification of Chhain, see S.P.Gupta, "Jhain of the Delhi Sultanate" in *Medieval India– A Miscellany*, Vol. III (Bombay : Asia, 1975) 209-15.
[164] Ishwari Prasad, *History of Medieval India* (Allahabad : Indian Press, 1966) 244.
[165] Such measures were necessary to establish full control over them.
[166] Barani, *Tarikh* 194.
[167] Barani, *Tarikh* 194.

In order to ensure that cultivators sold the requisite quantities of grain to the merchants in the fields (*bar sar-i kisht*) and that the merchants brought it promptly to the Sultan's markets,[168] the sixth regulation enjoined that the *shahna* should take deeds of assurance from the revenue collectors (*mutasarrifs*) and functionaries (*karkunan*) of the assigned territories in the *Doab*. The assurance was to the effect that the revenue collectors would demand the state share of revenue with such severity that the peasants would be unable to take the grain from the fields to their houses for the purpose of regrating, and they would have to sell it to the corn carriers at a low price.[169] The seventh regulation related to the intelligence system. The Sultan received reports about the grain market from three independent sources: the *Shahna-i-Mandi* (comptroller of market), the intelligence officers (*barids*) and the secret spies (*munhis*). If there was any variance in these reports, the defaulters were punished.[170] Ibn Battuta also tells us of the report on prices being daily laid before Alauddin Khalji.[171]

As a result of the above mentioned regulations, the prices of grain were reduced and the specified scales of prices were maintained throughout the reign of Alauddin Khalji,[172]

[168] Jackson 245.
[169] Barani 194. The villagers had the option to carry their corn into the market and sell it for their own profit at the official rates.
[170] Barani, *Tarikh* 195.
[171] Battuta 41.
[172] Ferishta also observes that "the orders continued throughout the reign of this monarch." See Muhammad Qasim Ferishta, *Tarikh-i-Ferishta*, Eng. Trans. J. Briggs, *History of the Rise of the Mahomedan Power in India*, Vol. I (Calcutta : Cambray & Co.,1966) 202.

irrespective of whether the rains were abundant or scanty. As a precautionary measure for meeting scarcity in case of failure of rains, provision was made by a regulation of rationing. A quantity of corn sufficient for the daily supply of each *mohalla*, was consigned to the local grain dealers (*baqqals*) every day from the central market. Half a *man* was allowed to the ordinary purchasers in the market. If, in times of scarcity, "any poor reduced person" went to the market and did not get his requirement, the *shahna* in charge was sure to be punished.[173]

It may be inferred that prices were a matter of interest to the peasant at least as far back as the thirteenth century.[174] The regulations for lowering prices of grain demonstrate the interdependence between the pricing and land tax policies of Alauddin Khalji. It was the magnitude of the agrarian taxation and the severity with which it was implemented, which enabled Alauddin Khalji to achieve the twin objectives of filling the state granaries and securing to grain carriers supplies at low prices.[175] Both these objectives were crucial to price reduction and control.

The second set of regulations was issued by the Sultan for the purpose of securing low prices of cloth and groceries. The *Sarai Adl* was established[176] as the exclusive market for manufactured commodities, foreign wares and other merchandise brought from distant parts of the country. These specified

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[173] Barani, *Tarikh* 195.
[174] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 38.
[175] Irfan Habib, "Price Regulations" 93.
[176] It was established on an extensive piece of land lying waste on the inner side of the Badaun Gate near the *Koshak-i-Sabz* (Green Palace).

commodities were cloth, sugar, vegetables, fruits, animal oil and lamp oil.[177] Amir Khusrau mentions that all kinds of cloth, fruits and all other necessities of life were put on sale at low prices.[178] Ferishta has given the following price list of edible commodities for the capital:

Table 2

Commodity	Weight	Price
1.sugar candy	1 *seer*	2 *jitals*
2.coarse sugar (*shakar*)	1 *seer*	1 *jital*
3. coarse sugar *surkh* (*gur*)	1 *seer*	0.5 *jitals*
4 .lamp oil	3 *seers*	1 *jital*
5. ghee	1 *seer*	0.5 *jitals*
6. salt	5 *seers*	1 *jital*
7. onions & garlic	1 *seer*	1 *jital*

Source: Ferishta[179]

To ensure an adequate supply of all the commodities, all the merchants whether Hindu or Muslim, were registered with the ministry of commerce (*diwan-i riyasat*) and a deed taken from them that they would bring the same quantities of commodities to the *sarai adl* every year, and sell them at government rates.[180] The Sultan advanced twenty lakh *tankas* to the *Multanis* to bring commodities from the provinces in order to ensure cheap prices if the merchants delayed to bring their wares to the *Sarai Adl.*[181] Ferishta states that the export of finer qualities of cloth and silks from the capital was prohibited in order that traders or wealthy citizens might not buy the stuff

[177] Barani, *Tarikh* 196.
[178] Askari 101.
[179] Ferishta, Vol. I 204.
[180] Habib and Nizami 383.
[181] Day 82-83.

from Delhi at a low price and sell it at higher rates elsewhere. Moreover, people were not permitted to wear superior garments and silks at home, except by special permission from the Sultan which was only granted to men of rank.[182] Prices were also fixed for horses, slaves and cattle. In addition, there were several general markets in the city in which prices were fixed of each and every article of consumption such as caps, shoes, combs, needles etc. Barani mentions that the stability of prices under Alauddin was "indeed the wonder of the age; and no other monarch was able to affect it." [183]

It is not possible to define the territory in which Alauddin Khalji's price measures were effective. Barani speaks as if the price control measures had the city of Delhi as their focus. When referring to grain prices, he describes the control of a specific grain market (*mandi*) at Delhi.[184] Grain supplies are said to have reached Delhi continuously and even when the rains were deficient, "there was no want of corn in Delhi."[185] Ferishta, writing in the seventeenth century, is the first historian to hint that the price control zone may have had a more extensive domain, and was not confined to Delhi alone. Ferishta, while quoting the prices of grain fixed at Delhi, remarks that the prices in the rest of the empire can be estimated from them.[186] However, he had no data to support his suggestion of similarly low prices

[182] Ferishta, Vol. I 203.
[183] Barani, *Tarikh* 195-97.
[184] Barani, *Tarikh* 192-93.
[185] Barani, *Tarikh* 195.
[186] Ferishta, Vol. I 202.

prevailing elsewhere.

Since price control was introduced in order to maintain a large standing army on relatively low pay,[187] there was nothing unreasonable if the focal point of the policy was to keep prices low at Delhi alone. For Delhi was the capital, the principal city, the chief mart and the military camp of the Sultanate.[188] But the attempt to keep prices low at Delhi must have necessitated control of prices at a number of other points. In the region around Delhi, a general fall in agricultural prices had to be enforced to enable supplies to reach Delhi. If we accept that high agrarian taxation was at the root of the success of low grain prices, then the price control zone could certainly not exceed the heavy tax zone outlined by Barani. This region extended from Lahore to Chhain in the south and Katehr in the east. It is unlikely that the measures for price control extended to towns outside this region.[189]

Even if the price-control measures of Alauddin Khalji affected Delhi and its surrounding regions only, these were a unique set of measures. A story recorded in *Shaikh* Nasiruddin's *Khairul Majalis*, written in 1352-53 attributes to Alauddin a desire "to do something the benefit of which may be enjoyed by everybody"; accordingly he "planned to cheapen the food-stuff."[190] Barani puts the measures at the top among Alauddin

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[187] Jackson 245.

[188] The bulk of the army was probably concentrated at Delhi as the soldiers of the central army received their salaries in cash from the treasury.

[189] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 87.

[190] Kishori Saran Lal, *History of the Khaljis A.D. 1290-1320* (Bombay : Asia, 1967) 218-9.

Khalji's achievements[191] but he does not expressly style them as a work of general public welfare. A close examination of the benefits accruing from them shows that low prices did not mean an enhancement of the real income of all. In fact, the result was an increase in the real income of some classes and decrease in the income of many.

The rural population did not benefit from price control. The peasants from *khot* to *balaḥar* had to part with half their produce.[192] They were not allowed to hold back any surplus for engrossing.[193] Whatever surplus they had could be sold, but only at the prescribed rates of the state. In a country of variable rainfall and, consequently, of variable production– the official rates were invariable; no allowance was made for the difficulties of the peasantry in dry seasons. Ferishta says that there was no change in prices owing to lack of rain or other causes that bring famine.[194] The stringent measures adopted to eliminate the role played by the intermediaries in revenue collection, left large segments of the upper rural population i.e. the *khots*, *muqaddams* and *chaudharis*, considerably impoverished.[195] Alauddin's economic system provided relief for consumers at the capital at the cost of producers in the rural areas.

Even in the city, the gain from low prices was by no

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191 Even above his constant succession of victories and repeated repulse of the Mongols. Barani, *Tarikh* 206.

192 R.P.Tripathi, *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration* (1936; Allahabad : Central Book Depot, 1992) 259-60.

193 Battuta refers to the undoing of the engrossers. Battuta 42.

194 Ferishta, Vol. I 202.

195 Barani, Tarikh 182-83. They could no longer ride horses, wield arms, wear fine clothes and chew betel leaf.

means universal. The profits of merchants, shopkeepers, engrossers, regrators, brokers etc. were of course forcibly reduced. The narrow margin allowed to the merchant offered him no incentive.[196] The worst hit were the artisans, unskilled labourers and servants because the prices of manufactures were fixed and their profit margin sharply narrowed. It seems that exceptionally low wages prevailed during Sultan Alauddin's reign. Barani says that wages and salaries rose sharply in the reign of his successor, Qutbuddin Mubarak Khalji. While wages of artisans registered a four-fold increase, the salaries of servants rose six to ten times the amount they were paid during Alauddin Khalji's reign.[197] This could only be possible if the earlier rates current were abnormally low. *Shaikh* Nasiruddin Mahmud also recalled that while a tailor charged only 4 or 6 *jitals* for preparing a robe in Alauddin's time, the rates for the same were now (c.1354) as high as one *tanka* (48 *jitals*).[198] All this indicates the general lack of money in the hands of the people. Thus purchasing power was limited and owing to low wages, ordinary people did not benefit from the low prices. A humorous saying current in Delhi went, "A camel could be had for a *dang*, but wherefrom the *dang*?"[199]

The soldiers probably fared a little better. The salary of the soldier was fixed and the Sultan had ventured upon these experiments in political economy so that the soldier might live

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[196] Majumdar, ed. 28.
[197] Barani, *Tarikh* 212-3.
[198] Irfan Habib,"Price Regulations" 104.
[199] Lal 220.

on this pay, support his family, and furnish himself with horses and arms.[200] The greatest advantage from price control would have accrued to people who had money to spend and could thus take advantage of low prices. The principal gainers therefore must have been the nobles.

After Alauddin Khalji's death his price control system collapsed. Under his successor Qutbuddin Mubarak Khalji (1316-20), all regulations were allowed to lapse and prices rose rapidly. Barani writes:

> The necessaries of life and grain rose in price, the old regulations and tariffs were unheeded, and piece goods were sold at prices fixed by the vendors. The *Multanis* engaged in their own business, and in every house drums and tabors were beaten, for the *bazar* people rejoiced over the death of Alauddin. They now sold their goods at their own price, and cheated and fleeced people as they liked.[201]

Despite Barani's strong crusade in favour of price control,[202] the policy was dropped because Alauddin's son and successor, had neither the will nor the capacity to keep them in force.

The prices during the reign of Muhammad Tughluq (1325-51) were high due to extensive droughts, severe famines, constant rebellions and ill executed administrative projects. The prices of agricultural commodities during his reign are given by the author of *Masalik-ul-Absar* which he obtained from an eminent Indian, Shaikh Mubarak.[203]

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[200] Stanley Lanepoole, *Medieval India Under Mohammedan Rule* (Delhi : Universal, 1963) 88.
[201] Barani, *Tarikh* 212.
[202] Barani, *Fatawa* 34-38. He gives nine advantages accruing from price control.
[203] Umari 109, 133.

Table 3

Commodity	Weight	Price
1. Wheat	per *man*	12 *jitals*
2. Barley	per *man*	8 *jitals*
3. Rice	per *man*	14 *jitals*
4. Sugar	5 *seers*	8 *jitals*
5. *Khand* (crystallised sugar)	4 *seers*	8 *jitals*

Source: *Masalik-ul-Absar*

Prices during famine years were higher; corn rose to 16 and 17 *jitals* per *man*.[204] The prices prevailing in Bengal were much lower. Ibn Battuta gives us the prices prevailing in Bengal but his names for coins and weights lead to confusion. If his silver *dinar*[205] was the *hashtgani*, his, *dirham* the *jital*, and his '*ratl* of Delhi' the *ser*,[206] then his prices can be converted into the known Indian coins and weights. The price of rice was considered to be high in Bengal when it sold for 25 *ser* per *hashtgani* or about 13 *jitals* per *man*.[207] Normally 1¼ *mans* of husked rice are said to have sold for one *hashtgani* in Bengal. Thus, at less than 5½ *jitals* per *man*, husked rice in Bengal was substantially cheaper than at Delhi where the rate was 14 *jitals* per man.[208]

The prices seemed to have remained high till the early years of Sultan Firuz Tughluq (1351-88) as the *Insha-i-Mahru*

[204] Barani, Tarikh 244.
[205] A silver *dinar* may be taken as another term for a silver *tanka*.
[206] Umari 109,132-33.
[207] Battuta 234.
[208] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 88.

and the *Khairul Majalis*, the contemporary works, show. *Shaikh* Nasiruddin Chirag's conversation indicates the acute economic distress during the early years of Firuz Shah's reign and a contrast is drawn with the all-round cheapness in Alauddin'' reign.[209] But the establishment of peace and order by Firuz Shah soon created conditions favourable for prosperity.

Shams-i-Siraj Afif's list of prices reveals that the prices were brought down once more. Mahru is the first authority to give an indication of the decline in prices that began during Firuz Tughluq's reign.[210] Afif has emphasized that the downward trend of prices was not due to any effort on the part of the Sultan himself. He says:

> The cheapness and abundance was not limited to the capital city only but was all pervasive in the entire kingdom. During the forty years of Sultan's reign, no one ever saw famine. People forgot the abundance and cheapness of Alauddin Khalji's reign. The Sultan (Khalji) had laboured hard to usher in cheapness and its description is found in all books of history. Alauddin advanced money to the traders and conferred upon them, wealth and gold and even stipends and other benefits. Hence there was so much cheapness, but, during the reign of Firoz Shah, the cheapness of grain and other commodities resulted without any endeavour and effort. The cheapness during the reign of Firoz Shah was a gift of God resulting from the purity and belief of the Sultan.[211]

Afif gives the price of wheat at eight *jitals* per *man*; grain and barley, four *jitals* per *man*; sugar, one *jital* per *man*.[212] He admits, however, that when rainfall was scarce, the prices of cereals rose to one *tanka* per *man*, but it was only for a short

[209] Habib and Nizami 605-6.
[210] Mahru 22.
[211] Afif, trans. Jauhri 170.
[212] Afif, trans. Jauhri 170.

time for there was no real famine in the reign.[213]

The agricultural prices came down to an exceptionally low level in the reign of Ibrahim Lodi (1517-26). One *bahloli*, which was 1.6 *jitals* in value, could buy 10 *mans* of corn, 5*seers* of oil and 10 yards of coarse cloth. The prevailing cheapness of grain extended to all classes of commodities.[214] The low prices might be due to copious rain followed by abundant harvests, and largely to the want of metallic currency[215] since "gold and silver were only procurable with the greatest difficulty."[216] Moreland believes that the shortage of precious metals may have been the reason for Ibrahim's order requiring the tax collections to be made only in grain.[217] With the beginning of the silver influx from the New World soon afterwards, the prices could have tended to pick up.[218]

Our study of agricultural prices shows that during Alauddin's reign, the prices of essential commodities were rigorously controlled if not artificially depressed. The prices went up under Muhammad Tughluq which can be attributed to a seven-year famine. Under Firuz Tughluq, the prices again showed a downward trend but without any effort on the part of the emperor. This may be attributed to the fiscal policy of the Sultan and the new irrigation facilities, which resulted in the

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213 Afif, trans. Jauhri 170; trans. Elliot and Dowson 345.
214 Abdullah, *Tarikh-i-Daudi*, Eng. trans. Elliot and Dowson, *History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. IV (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, 1964) 476.
215 V.A.Smith, *The Oxford History of India*, 3rd ed.(London : OUP, 1958) 263.
216 Abdullah 476.
217 Moreland 68.
218 *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I 67; Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 36-38.

expansion of the area under cultivation. We also find the increased introduction of the cash crops like wheat and sugarcane.[219]

[219] Afif, trans. Jauhri 91-92.

Chapter 7

AGRARIAN SYSTEM AND DISINTEGRATION OF THE DELHI SULTANATE

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate heralded a new epoch in the history of India. It liquidated the decentralized multi-state system which had dominated the Indian political scene in the eleventh and twelfth centuries,[1] and paved the way for a centralized political organization, controlled by a monarch. In the economic field, as suggested by Mohammad Habib, there was an expansion of the towns and an important alteration in agrarian relationships. Literary as well as numismatic evidence, suggests a fairly noticeable upsurge in urban life. The principal basis on which the town populations could subsist was provided by the increase in revenues that the Sultanate ruling class drew from the countryside.[2]

The collection of land revenue was integrated with the military system, as also with the system of provincial government through the institution of *iqtas* organized by Iltutmish. The *iqta* was the land or revenue assigned by the ruler to an individual on certain conditions.[3] During the thirteenth century the Turkish conquerors of northern India had tremendous difficulties in creating an administrative structure capable of

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[1] See Chapter 1.
[2] Irfan Habib, "Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries", Unpublished proceedings of *Seminar on Economic History of Medieval India* Aligarh (1-3 February 2003) 1, 7.
[3] The areas whose revenues were thus assigned by the emperor were known in the Mughal empire as *jagirs*.

sustaining and strengthening their military power. K.A. Nizami writes :

> The Turks lost no time in realizing that effective administration over a vast territory, with so many fissiparous tendencies working inside and the external pressure increasing on its frontiers, was not possible without evolving an effective local apparatus to help the centre in integrating its resources and consolidating its power. The *iqta* system, as it worked in India during the thirteenth century, was a device to meet these requirements of the time. Aibek and Iltutmish derived full advantage from this system. They used it as an instrument for liquidating the feudal order of Indian society and linking up the far-flung parts of the empire to one centre. Through it they satisfied also the cupidity of the Turkish governing class, and solved the urgent problem of the maintenance of law and order and the collection of revenues in the newly conquered territories.[4]

The term *iqta* applied not only to the large assignments enjoyed by great *amirs* but also to the smaller ones given by Iltutmish to the two thousand Turkish soldiers in the *Doab*.[5] The holders of big *iqtas* were provincial governors called *muqtis*. The *muqti* governed on behalf of the king, collected land revenue and contributed his own share of the military contingents fixed by the king. The holders of small *iqtas* were individual troopers and had no administrative responsibilities.[6]

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[4] Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Religion and Politics in India During the Thirteenth Century*, new ed. (New Delhi : Oxford UP, 2002) 138.

[5] Peter Jackson, *The Delhi Sultanate A Political and Military History* (Cambridge : Cambridge UP, 1999) 95.

[6] See S.B.P. Nigam, *Nobility Under The Sultans of Delhi A.D. 1206-1398* (Delhi : Munshiram, 1968) 96-102.

The *iqta*, in principle, provided a temporary right to collect revenue and a particular *amir* held an *iqta* for a period of two, three or four years. The length of tenure varied a great deal and even more variable was their size, ranging from rights over large provinces like Awadh or Bengal to a small number of villages.[7] A *muqti*, whose assignment was liable to be transferred any moment and who never held the same *iqta* for more than three or four years at the most, could have no interest in following a far-sighted policy of agricultural development. The amount of supervisory control over the assignees varied a great deal in practice. The *iqtadars* generally lived in the provinces assigned to them and only some, mainly those near the capital, were absentee governors who ruled through deputies. This made it difficult to maintain control over them.[8] In times of crisis occasioned by the weakness of the monarch the *muqtis* tried to raise the standard of revolt and became overlords of their own territory which indicates that the *muqtis* were always inclined to make capital out of the Sultan's weakness.[9] It was always difficult to control governors of distant places such as Bengal, Sindh, Gujarat, Daulatabad etc.

In the *khalisa* villages, where revenue was reserved for the Sultan's treasury, the Sultan's *muhassils* (revenue

[7] Andre Wink, *Al-Hind The Making of The Indo-Islamic World*, Vol. II (New Delhi : Oxford UP, 1999) 212.
[8] Wink, Vol. II 213.
[9] During the years of anarchy after Iltutmish's death, the *iqtadars* adopted an attitude of defiance towards the central authority. Balban exercised tight control over them and appointed confidential spies everywhere. See Ziauddin Barani's *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*, Eng. trans. Elliot and Dowson, Vol. III (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, n.d.) 98-103; 107-8.

collectors) realized the demands through the village headmen known as *khots*, *muqaddams* and *chaudharis*.[10] Another class of land was that which was left in the hands of its original holders on condition of paying tribute. These Hindu chiefs continued to enjoy autonomy within their jurisdiction as long as they did not break the terms of the agreement or the ambition of the Sultan did not lead to the annexation of their lands.[11] The tributary Hindu chiefs had never been particularly amenable to control and at times became politically disaffected. They were always ready to withhold tribute and to create trouble: the slightest weakening of the government was a signal for revolt.[12]

There was no possibility of establishing direct relation with the peasantry except perhaps in limited areas contiguous to the capital, for official authority was more or less effective only in the towns and the vast rural areas, where the peasants lived and ploughed, were beyond the limits of the direct control of the state. The land revenue was collected on behalf of the Sultan by intermediaries who may be classed as chiefs, representatives, assignees, grantees and farmers.[13] Although, with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, certain improvements in agricultural tools and methods took place, they did not lead even remotely to technological revolution. In general, they contributed to the extension and reinforcement of

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[10] Barani, *Tarikh* 182-183.
[11] R.P. Tripathi, *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration* (1936; Allahabad : Central Book Depot, 1992) 246-7.
[12] Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *The Administration of the Sultanate of Delhi* (New Delhi : Oriental Reprint, 1971) 210.
[13] W.H. Moreland, *The Agrarian System of Moslem India* (1929; New Delhi : Atlantic, 1994) 8-11.

peasant agriculture, not to its subversion or transformation.[14] Moreland believes that the real master of the peasant's fate was not the king and his Minister or the assessor and collector of revenue, but the farmer of revenue and the assignee. He also adds that the tenure of assignees and farmers was too short and uncertain to justify expenditure of capital or effort on a constructive policy of development.[15]

Increasing pressure was exerted by the state on the peasants so that the bulk of the peasant's surplus was collected as revenue increasingly in cash.[16] The rulers did not make any effort to increase the tax-paying capacity of the peasants. They chose to adopt the politically expedient policy of leaving the peasants a balance enough for subsistence.[17] The revenue demand set by the imperial authorities was thus designed ideally to approximate to the surplus produce, leaving the peasant just the barest minimum needed for subsistence. There was a tendency on the part of the superior elements in the countryside i.e. the *khots* and *muqaddams* to escape from paying land revenue on their own lands, while collecting it from the mass of the peasants.[18] Barani's account of Alauddin Khalji's agrarian reforms shows that his government stood forth as the protector of the 'weak'

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[14] Irfan Habib, *Essays in Indian History : Towards a Marxist Perception* (New Delhi : Tulika, 1995) 142.

[15] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 205.

[16] Harbans Mukhia, *Perpectives On Medieval History* (New Delhi : Vikas, 1993) 171. The change to a cash nexus was a major new feature of the agrarian economy now established.

[17] Lallanji Gopal, "Indian Agriculture – A Historical Perspective" in A.Rahman ed., *History of Indian Science, Technology and Culture A.D. 1000-1800*, PHISPC (New Delhi : Oxford UP 2000) 316.

[18] They levied a cess of their own (*qismat-i khoti*) on the peasants. Barani, *Tarikh* 185.

against the 'strong' by imposing taxes on the local potentates and headmen[19] but this was done only to safeguard and enhance its own share of the producer's surplus.

The real nature of Alauddin's agrarian administration is revealed by Afif when he says that the peasants of Dipalpur suffered greatly on account of a demand for advance payment of the year's revenue in cash but, "being the reign of Alauddin Khalji, no one dared raise the standard of rebellion".[20] The pressure on peasants could not, however, continue beyond a point. Under Muhammad Tughluq (1325-51), a further increase in taxation / rigorous collection led to a very serious and long-drawn-out agrarian uprising in the *Doab*. It was a massive peasant rebellion led by the upper village strata, the *khots* and *muqaddams*. Apparently, the two rural classes united when they were alike hit by the newly imposed burden. Their uprising, due to its severity, extent and duration, occupies a very significant place in the annals of India's peasant revolts.[21] It marked the beginning of the great disorders of Muhammad Tughluq's reign which ultimately led to the dismemberment of his empire.

The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate led to the rise of a consolidated and centralized political organization which withstood the onslaughts of even the Mongol invaders. Hindustan, which had become merely a geographical expression

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[19] Barani, *Tarikh* 182-3.

[20] Shams-i Siraj Afif, *Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi*, Eng. trans. R.C. Jauhri, *Medieval India in Transition – Tarikh-i Firoz Shahi A First Hand Account* (New Delhi : Sundeep, 2001) 44.

[21] Irfan Habib, *Essays* 91.

under the Rajputs, regained its political individuality under the Turks.[22] With the rise of the power of the Khaljis, rapid territorial expansion took place.[23] The process of the decay of the Sultanat began under Muhammad bin Tughluq (1325-51), gained momentum during the reign of Firuz Tughluq (1351-88) and the once grand Turkish empire of India was reduced to a petty principality of Delhi within a decade of the latter's death. The successors of Firuz Tughluq were all phantom rulers (1388-1413) who wielded neither substantial sovereign powers nor possessed sufficient territories under their effective control. Amir Timur's invasion of 1398 took away the last semblance of royalty professed by the princes of the Tughluq dynasty. K.S. Lal writes :

> Timur's invasion (1398) struck it like palsy; thereafter for half a century the Sultanate began to live as if on crutches. It showed some signs of recovery under the Lodis (1451-1526); but it was like the last flicker of a dying lamp. Babur's guns at Panipat sounded its death knell.[24]

Regional factors of disintegration were strong in medieval India. Numerous powerful chiefs, who either had a clan following of their own or had strong links with particular areas, were always ready to rebel when they found any weakness in the

[22] Nizami, *Religion and Politics* 89.

[23] See Amir Khusrau, *Khazainul Futuh*, Eng. trans. Mohammad Habib, *The Campaigns of Alauddin Khalji* in K.A. Nizami, ed. *Politics and Society During the Early Medieval Period* (Aligarh : PPH,1981) 167-249.

[24] Kishori Saran Lal, *Twilight of the Sultanate* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1980 revised ed.) 1.

central government.[25]

In the following sections an attempt will be made to study how far the agrarian factors i.e. the land revenue system and the assignment system were responsible for the disintegration of the Delhi Sultanate. The main point of conflict between the imperial authorities and the assignees was the size of the latter's share in the land revenue or in the surplus produce. A remarkable thing throughout the history of Muslim domination was the tendency to revolt on the part of the governors in the outlying provinces of the empire. These governors often acted as independent rulers, and in an age when the means of communication were inadequate, and the highways mostly unsafe, the treasures of the state accumulated in the provinces furnished sinews of war to those who wished to shake off the yoke of the sovereign power.[26] The rulers also had to contend with the Hindu opposition. The resistance of Hindu leadership was almost continuous and the annals of the Sultanate repeatedly refer to the risings in the *Doab*, Katehar, Mewat, Rajputana, and the Khokhar land. This was the first reason why, when the Sultanate showed signs of weakness and had the misfortune of having a succession of weak kings, disintegration became chronic.[27]

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[25] Satish Chandra, *Medieval India From Sultanat To The Mughals*, Part One, 2nd ed. (New Delhi : Har Anand, 2001 reprint) 127.
[26] Ishwari Prasad, *A History of the Qaraunah Turks in India* (Allahabad : Indian Press 1936) 140.
[27] Awadh Bihari Pandey, *The First Afghan Empire in India 1451-1526 A.D.* (Calcutta : Bookland, 1956) 21-22.

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Muhammad bin Tughluq's accession to the throne in 1325 was smooth and without any opposition since he had already been designated as heir apparent by Ghiyasuddin Tughluq.[28] By 1328 A.D. he had succeeded in establishing his authority almost upto the southern extremity of the Indian peninsula. But in less than ten years the entire region to the south of the Krishna Tungabhadra line, and even a part of Telingana and the coastal districts of Andhra were lost. It marked the disintegration of the empire in a manner, which no one could fail to notice. Big cracks appeared in the mighty fabric of the Delhi Sultanate, and it was no longer a question of whether but when that great structure would fall.[29]

Muhammad Tughluq's reign was characterized by rebellion and disaster. He embarked on various ambitious projects which entailed considerable expenditure. The failure of four major projects, viz., transfer of the capital (1326-27), the experiment of token currency (1330-32), Khurasan (1332-33) and Qarachil (1333-34) expeditions[30], had disastrous effect on the finances of the state. The royal treasury was almost emptied and wealth "which is the true source of political power", according to Barani, "was expended".[31] According to Lanepoole, "The drain

[28] Barani, *Tarikh* 235.
[29] R.C. Majumdar, ed., *History and Culture of the Indian People*, Vol. VI (Bombay : Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, 1960) 77.
[30] These projects have been described by Barani, *Tarikh* 238-42.
[31] Barani, *Tarikh* 241.

on the treasury compelled fresh taxation, and there is no doubt that an oppressive fiscal system in a country where the margin of agricultural profit is minute was the chief rock upon which Muhammad Tughluq's government split".[32]

Certain agrarian measures of the Sultan viz. enhancement of revenue in the *Doab* followed by epidemics, and a famine which lasted for six to seven years and affected large parts of the *Doab* and Malwa, created serious public distress, and a widespread peasant uprising. Prolonged unrest in the *Doab* acted as a spur to the next wave of revolts in more distant provinces from 1335 onwards, notably those in Ma'bar, Bengal and Tilang.[33] The year 1335, in which the Ma'bar rebellion took place marks the beginning of countrywide disorders and general upsurge against the unpopular rule of Muhammad bin Tughluq. The Sultan gradually lost his hold over his military generals, provincial governors and the feudal chieftains who, individually as well as collectively, resorted to revolts in quick succession. The Ma'bar rebellion, therefore, constitutes a watershed in the history of the Delhi Sultanate; it signals the decline and slow disintegration of the mighty Turkish empire of early Medieval India.[34]

There is some force in the argument that the vastness of the empire, reached during the first decade of Muhammad bin

[32] Stanley Lanepoole, *Medieval India Under Mohammedan Rule* (Delhi : Universal, 1963) 101.
[33] Jackson 267.
[34] The Ma'bar rebellion was preceded by six rebellions and followed by fifteen. The rebellions from 1335 to 1351 were far more widespread.

Tughluq's reign, carried the seeds of its own decay. By the time of his accession a policy of direct rule was progressively replacing that of plundering and levying tribute on Hindu kingdoms.[35] Such a rapid expansion of the directly ruled territories and such a high degree of centralisation had their own pitfalls and were, probably a major factor underlying the acute economic difficulties, which overwhelmed the Sultanate in the 1330s. Launching regular attacks on enemy territory to finance a sizeable standing army for other purposes was one thing; it was quite another to maintain garrisons and a civil administration in a conquered province, with all the expense involved in annual accounting and transportation of revenues.[36]

Forgetting his father's wise percept that the imposition of additional burden on the peasantry should be gradual,[37] Muhammad Tughluq considerably enhanced the land revenue in the *Doab* which led to widespread peasant rebellion. The statement that the increase was of the order of one to ten and one to twenty can only be a rhetorical one and is meant to convey a sense of considerable increase.[38] New cesses were levied, and the old cesses – grazing tax (*charai*) and the house tax (*ghari*) were collected in a rigorous manner. When assessing the yield of a field, not the actual produce, but the standard yield was taken into account. Further , when commuting the state's

[35] Barani, *Tarikh* 236. Barani mentions the provinces of the empire which were Delhi, Gujarat, Malwa, Deogir, Telingana (Tilang), Kampila, Dvarasamudra, Ma'bar, Lakhnauti, Satgaon, Sonargaon and Tirhut.
[36] Jackson 255.
[37] Barani, *Tarikh* 230.
[38] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 48.

share into cash, not the actual but the officially assumed prices were used.[39]

These measures provoked a widespread revolt among the cultivators in the *Doab*, who burned their crops, drove off their cattle and took refuge in the jungles. This conduct of the cultivators amounted to rebellion, since the peasant's duty to till the soil formed the fundamental conception of the agrarian system of medieval India.[40] In the words of Barani :

> The enforcement of those schemes was made so rigorous that the feeble and low among the *raiyat* were wiped out, while those who were rich and possessed the means and wherewithal became rebellious, with the result that the cities and districts were ruined and cultivation was reduced to nothing. On hearing of the ruin and destruction of the *raiyat* in the *Doab* and fearing but a similar fate should befall them, the inhabitants of distant provinces also revolted and crept into jungles. On account of the diminution of cultivation in the *Doab* land (*miyan-i-Doab*), the ruin of the *raiyat* of the *miyan-i-Doab* and the rare arrival of caravans and convoys of grain from other parts of Hindustan in Delhi as well as in the suburbs of Delhi and in the whole of the *Doab* area, a destructive famine broke out; prices of grain soared high and rains also stopped. A general famine prevailed which continued for several years during which period perished millions of human beings; the old established life was disorganised and many people were displaced and uprooted.

[39] See Tapan Ray Chaudhary and Irfan Habib, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of India 1200-1750*, Vol. I (Hyderabad : Orient, 1984) 63-4.

[40] Agha Mahdi Husain, *The Rise and Fall of Muhammad Bin Tughluq* (Delhi : IAD, 1972) 152.

> From that day departed the great glory of Sultan Muhammad's empire and his administration declined and became ineffective.[41]

The Sultan adopted the usual methods to suppress rebellion. Thus, *shiqdars* and *faujdars* (revenue collectors and military officials) were ordered to lay waste and plunder the country. In consequence, many of the *khots* and *muqaddams* were killed, or took refuge in forests. Moreland describes this stage when he says, "many of the leading men were killed or blinded".[42] The Sultan's troops surrounded the jungles and killed everyone whom they found within the jungle. Thus the entire area from Kannauj to Dalmau was laid waste.[43]

The failure of the grain to reach Delhi from the *Doab* gave rise to famine, which lasted for seven years.[44] It became so rigorous that "the price of a *maund* of wheat rose to sixty *dirhams* and a little later it rose still higher. There was general hardship and the situation became very grave.[45] Barani attributes the causes of the famine to the decline of cultivation in the *Doab*, the ruin of its peasantry, the failure of grain to reach Delhi from other parts of the empire and lastly the failure of rains.[46] The Sultan's efforts to encourage cultivation by having

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41 Improved trans. in Agha Mahdi Husain, *Tughluq Dynasty* (New Delhi : S. Chand, 1976 reprint) 225-26.
42 Moreland, *Agrarian System* 49.
43 Barani, *Tarikh* 242.
44 Al-Badaoni, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*, Eng. trans. and ed. George S.A. Ranking, Vol. I (Delhi : IAD, 1973 reprint) 316.
45 Ibn Battuta, *Rehla*, Eng. trans. Mahdi Husain (Baroda : Oriental Institute, 1953) 117. Battuta arrived at Delhi in 1334.
46 Barani, *Tarikh* 238.

wells dug in the vicinity of Delhi, and by advancing agricultural loans (*sondhar*) to peasants were unavailing.[47]

The *Doab* episode was silently merged into the countrywide discontent against the rule of Muhammad bin Tughluq. The people had rebelled under a painful necessity and "if political disturbances occurred in the *Doab*, - a most sensitive part of Hindustan, - the blame rests upon the administration and not upon the people".[48] Northern India was under the grip of a severe famine and the people of the *Doab* were in ferment when Saiyyid Hasan, the governor of Ma'bar raised his standard of revolt, "on the grounds of the severity of the Sultan's governors, and the innovations introduced in the laws".[49] Ma'bar, according to Ibn Battuta was situated at a distance of six months' march from Delhi.[50] The long distance from Delhi and the weakening of the central government owing to the severe famine, which seems to have covered the *Doab*, Malwa and East Punjab, gave the governor a chance to rebel.[51]

From Barani's language, it is evident that the nature of the Ma'bar rebellion was almost the same as that of the *Doab*. He tells us that on reaching Daulatabad on his way to Ma'bar, the Sultan levied heavy taxes (*abwab*) in Maharashtra (Mahratta country) and persons were specially appointed to levy them. Such atrocious demands drove many persons to kill themselves.[52]

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[47] Barani, *Tarikh* 244-45.
[48] Prasad, *History of Qaraunah Turks* 74.
[49] Badaoni, Vol. I 309.
[50] Battuta 99.
[51] Mohammad Habib and K.A. Nizami, *A Comprehensive History of India*, Vol. V (New Delhi : PPH, 1970) 526.
[52] Barani, *Tarikh* 243.

The Sultan personally led the imperial army to the south to deal with the Ma'bar rebellion. To his great misfortune, a severe outbreak of plague while he was at Bidar in Telingana, frustrated all his future plans. The plague broke out in his army, the bulk of which perished. Battuta says, "When the Sultan saw the misfortune which had befallen the army, he returned to Daulatabad since rebellion had become rife in the provinces and anarchy reigned in different parts.[53] The Ma'bar rebellion could not be crushed and it afforded an opportunity to Hasan to set himself up as an independent ruler at Madura with the title of Sultan Saiyyid Ahsan Shah. It was the first independent Muslim state carved out of the Sultanate of Delhi in the south. The independence of Ma'bar and the successful foundation of Madura Sultanate by Saiyyid Ahsan Shah, accompanied by the regaining of their independence by many of the subjugated Hindu principalities in South India bear testimony to the decline in the fortunes of Muhammad bin Tughluq and the disintegration of his empire.[54]

Military prowess had been the cementing force which held the distant provinces under the control of the Sultanate. The invincible central army was weakened by the loss of lives in the plague in 1335-36 and it became ineffective as an instrument of the central authority for several years. The Qarachil expedition

[53] Battuta 101. Battuta further says that "the sceptre would have fallen from his hands had it not been decreed by destiny that his good fortune should still continue".
[54] Iqtidar Alam Khan, "The Fifteenth Century : Economic Implications of Political Disintegration", Unpublished proceedings of *Seminar on Economic History of Medieval India* Aligarh (1-3 February 2003) 1.

(1333-34) had also greatly weakened the army of the Sultanate.[55] Two circumstances which bedevilled Muhammad's government for several years to come were a heavy reduction in the number of troops at his disposal, combined with a loss of revenue owing to decline in cultivation, due to which the Sultan was unable to rebuild his forces.[56] The larger number of rebellions after 1334 were no doubt inspired by the known weakness of the central army.

In 1330-31, the governor of Bengal had revolted against Delhi but he had been defeated and killed by an army sent by the Sultan. Thereafter, Muhammad Tughluq had made Bahram Khan, governor of Sonargaon and Qadr Khan, governor of Lakhnauti. On the death of Bahram Khan in 1338, Fakhruddin, the armour bearer (*silahdar*) of Bahram Khan, became rebellious and assumed the title of Sultan.[57] Between 1338 and 1341, due to the uprising in Bengal, eastern as well as western Bengal, Sonargaon as well as Lakhnauti were lost to Delhi and the efforts of Muhammad at stemming the revolution were completely frustrated.[58]

The extent of military and financial weakness to which the Sultanate had been reduced by the famine and the plague, can be determined from the fact that the Sultan made no effort to maintain his power over two principalities which he had annexed after a terrible cost of money and blood. In 1336 Hari

[55] Barani, *Tarikh* 242; Battuta 98.
[56] Jackson 269.
[57] Badaoni, Vol. I 308.
[58] Mahdi Husain, *Rise and Fall* 164.

Har and his brother Bukka Rai, founded a Hindu principality south of the river Krishna, which gradually expanded into the Vijaynagar empire.[59]

In 1335, a rebellion of the Hindus took place at Warangal under Kanhya *Naik* and the region was totally lost. About the same time one of Kanhya *Naik's* relations whom the emperor had sent to Kampila apostatized from Islam and revolted. Thus Kampila was also lost and nothing remained secure except Deogir and Gujarat.[60] The foundation of the Vijaynagar kingdom and the independence of Warangal and Kampili were the most severe blows to the Sultan's prestige. His dreams of founding a central Delhi Sultanate, controlling the whole of India, came to an end.[61]

The rebellion at Sunam and Samana was in the nature of a peasant revolt. The Jat and Rajput tribes in this region in east Punjab formed *mandals* (strong-holds), withheld the tribute and created disturbances.[62] It resembled the *Doab* rebellion because it was largely a rebellion of Hindus and its root cause was the refusal of the *ryots* to pay land tax.[63] The Sultan marched against the rebels personally, captured their leaders and brought them to Delhi.

The loss of revenue, accompanying the secession of a number of major provinces, had the insidious effect of increasing

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[59] For details see Robert Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire : Vijayanagar* (Ireland : Irish UP, 1972)

[60] Barani, Tarikh 245-46.

[61] S.A.A. Rizvi, *The Wonder That Was India*, Vol. II (Calcutta : Rupa, 1993 reprint) 48.

[62] Majumdar, ed. 78.

[63] Mahdi Hasan, *Rise and Fall* 164.

the pressure on Muhammad Tughluq to demand larger sums from areas that remained loyal. Some of the rebellions which took place from the close of 1338 to the middle of 1341, were because the Sultan had given the area on contract to some persons on the basis of their promising large sums of money which, however, they failed to collect from the peasants. Being afraid of the Sultan's wrath for having broken the contract, they were constrained to revolt out of desperation.

Nizam Main had undertaken to farm the revenue of Kara for several lakhs of *tankas* but could not realize even one-tenth of the amount he had promised.[64] He revolted in 1338, was captured and flayed alive. In 1338-39, Nusrat Khan who had undertaken to extract one crore *tankas* from Bidar, revolted. He failed to collect the fixed amount of revenue and also could not promote agriculture as he had promised. He was also defeated and taken to Delhi.[65] In 1339 Ali Shah revolted at Gulbarga, where he was deputed from Deogir to collect taxes. He was defeated and exiled to Ghazna.[66] Muhammad Tughluq added to his troubles by distrusting even the most trustworthy governors like Ain ul Mulk, the governor of Awadh and Zafrabad. The Sultan showed his displeasure against him by transferring him to Daulatabad in 1340-41. Ain ul Mulk revolted but was defeated and ultimately pardoned by the Sultan.[67]

In the closing years of his reign, Muhammad Tughluq

[64] Tripathi 281.
[65] Habib and Nizami 533; Battuta 104.
[66] Barani, Tarikh 247-48.
[67] For a detailed account see Prasad, *History of Qaraunah Turks* 163-170.

had to deal with the revolts of the *amiran-i-sadah* who were "officers-in-charge of fiscal-cum-administrative units, each comprising a hundred villages",[68] in Malwa, Gujarat and Daulatabad. They had charged the entire atmosphere from Cambay to Daulatabad with sedition and rebellion,[69] which ultimately paved the way for the emergence of the independent Bahmani kingdom. Muhammad had come to believe that the *amiran-i-sadah* in Gujarat and the Deccan were responsible for the fiscal problems of his government, and he decided to supersede them by bringing the revenues of the two provinces under closer control by the centre.[70] The rebellion of the *amiran-i-sadah* finally sealed the fate of the Sultanate in the south. The rebels in Gujarat were defeated; but at Deogir (Daulatabad) in 1347, Hasan Gangu, the most accomplished leader of the rebels ascended the throne at Daulatabad and laid the foundation of the Bahmani kingdom. When Muhammad died near Thatta in 1351, he wielded no authority south of the Vindhyas.

II

Firuz Tughluq (1351-88) inherited a fast disintegrating empire, infested with widespread revolts and disorders. Badaoni says :

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[68] Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *Perso-Arabic Sources of Information on the Life and Conditions of the Sultanate of Delhi* (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1992) 158. They combined both civil and military functions.

[69] Battuta 115.

[70] Jackson 272.

> Towards the end of the reign of Muhammad, disaffection and rebellion, mischief and sedition became increasingly evident day by day, so that if he turned his attention to curing one evil, another was not wanting to supply its place, and matters were past all remedy, and the glory of the kingdom, and prosperity of the country was entirely subverted.[71]

Muhammad Tughluq had given a shattering blow to the Sultanate of Delhi as an empire; Firuz Tughluq's reign was marked by the emergence of the forces for its ultimate decline. His long reign of thirty-seven years may be divided into two parts. The first period of about twenty years (1351-1371) is marked by new legislation to restore peace and prosperity. The second period (1371-1388) "was tarnished by the results of reaction – enervation, inanition, corruption, strifes, depression and a precipitate fall".[72]

Despite the constructive work done by Firuz Tughluq for the promotion of agriculture[73], his revenue policy was marred by certain defects. The further extension of the farming system by Firuz Tughluq and his paying his officials lavishly in the shape of assignments proved to be one of the chief causes of the Sultanate's decay. The system of assignment occupied a very important place in Firuz Shah's revenue administration. As a

[71] Badaoni, Vol. I 315.
[72] Mahdi Husain, *Tughluq Dynasty* 392.
[73] For an account of the five canals built by him see Yahya bin Ahmad Sirhindi, *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi*, Eng. trans. K.K. Basu (Baroda : Baroda Oriental Institute, 1932) 130-31, 137.

general policy Firuz Shah assigned numerous *iqtas*.[74] This resulted in the reduction of the *khalisa*. Within such of it as remained the Sultan established the system of paying soldiers by assigning them revenues of villages borne on the *khalisa*. Such villages were known as *wajh* and their holders, *wajhdars*.[75] This was a peculiar procedure of Firuz Shah and was not permitted by the earlier Sultans of Delhi. Afif himself remarks about what Sultan Alauddin repeatedly said :

> No villages be assigned in lieu of salary because in each village the number of inhabitants is about two or three hundred and they would be placed under the control of one *Wajehdar* (*Jagirdar*). If, on account of pride or misconduct, a few *Wajehdars* (*Jagirdars*) join hands or unite, then the thought of rebellion and riot can enter their hearts. For this fear of rebellion, Sultan Alauddin never granted a village in lieu of the salary and the royal army and troops got their salary in cash every year.[76]

Afif further adds that Firuz Shah, "assigned all villages and towns to the armymen in lieu of their salaries".[77] This is obviously an exaggeration; but there is hardly any doubt that the bulk of the revenue was assigned, although the army was not the sole beneficiary.

Some of the assignees sold their assignment order (*itlaq*) to a broker in Delhi and got one-third of the amount. The

[74] Afif, trans. Jauhri 171.
[75] Afif, trans. Jauhri 73, 135. The others were known as *ghair-wajhis*.
[76] Afif, trans. Jauhri 73; also trans. Elliot and Dowson, *History of India as told by its own Historians*, Vol. III (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, n.d.) 289.
[77] Afif, trans. Jauhri 73.

purchase of assignment orders became an important source of income for the city brokers; their profit amounted to about 17 percent.[78] The evils of the system were obvious and while the assignee was relieved of botheration and the bankers derived considerable profits, the State was a loser. Firuz Shah was aware of the enormous wealth that the brokers and officials acquired from this policy, but no steps were taken to modify it.[79] Even those soldiers and military officers who went to the villages instead of transferring their right to the brokers were not given administrative charge of their assignments. The system meant profit for grantees and brokers, opportunities for corruption on the part of State revenue officials, and suffering for the peasantry. Sometimes the assignee took illegal charge of villages and levied the *jiziyah* on the Hindus without State authority.[80]

Afif says that the whole army was paid by assignments of land-revenue (*wajh*). Elsewhere he says that many soldiers were paid in cash. It has been suggested that there were three methods of payment: assignment, *itlaq*, cash.[81] How the system actually worked cannot be determined. For instance, an assignment might yield more or less than its estimated value. In the former case the assignee, and in the latter case the State, would be the gainer. In any case, there was gross deviation from Alauddin's system of cash payment.

[78] Afif, trans. Jauhri 171.
[79] Tripathi 290.
[80] Ainuddin Abdullah bin Mahru, *Insha-i-Mahru*, partial Eng. trans. Shaikh Abdur Rashid (Lahore, 1965) 20-21.
[81] Elliot and Dowson, Vol. III 346.

Non-military assignments belonged to two classes. Sometimes land-revenue was assigned to Government functionaries from the territories and villages under their jurisdiction. For instance, the *wazir* (Khan-i-Jahan) was given a territory yielding thirteen lakh *tankas* for the maintenance of his troops, sons and dependents.[82] Assignments were also made to persons who were not connected with the administration, e.g., the *ulama*, the *Sufis*, etc. In non-military assignments the management was left to the assignees, so that they could rack-rent the peasantry and defraud the State by withholding its dues. The assignment system of Firuz Shah and the official corruption shielded by it, were the two greatest causes of the fall of the Sultanate. The third greatest cause was the declaring of all offices to be hereditary.[83]

It was the Sultan's policy to allow the heir of an *amir*, a *muqta* or an official to inherit his father's position, title, and *iqtas* or other emoluments. The weak and benevolent Firuz Shah ignored the precedent set by Alauddin Khalji and adopted the system of hereditary assignments as an integral feature of his administrative policy.

Firuz himself claims that he conferred offices of deceased incumbents upon their sons.[84] This is explicitly recorded in the case of *wajh* assignments, which, upon the death of the troopers, passed on to their sons, and failing them, to

[82] Afif, trans. Jauhri 171.
[83] Habib and Nizami 580. For the examples of Khan-i-Jahan and Imad-ul Mulk, see Chapter 5.
[84] Firuz Shah, *Futuhat-i-Firuz Shahi*, Eng. trans. Azra Alavi (Delhi : IAD, 1996) 33.

sons-in-law, slaves and widows.[85] This policy of hereditary offices was likely to implant in the *Diwan-i-Wizarat*, for example, officials incompetent to perform the administrative work, which was the complaint of Shams-ud-din Aburja when he was the Auditor General (*mustaufi-i-mamalik*) of the empire.[86] When applied to provincial governorships, it would in time lead to the creation of entrenched regional interests and the autonomous principalities which emerged in the era of Firuz Shah's grandsons.[87]

The extension of the farming system was another unfortunate aspect of Firuz Shah's policy. The worst feature of his farming system was that the revenue of even provinces was farmed to the government officials themselves. He strengthened the revenue-farmers' grip on the peasantry by placing the local machinery of government at their disposal.[88] A case is narrated of a farmer of the *niyabat* of Gujarat, Shams-ud-din Damghani, who offered to pay forty lakhs of *tankas* over and above its average revenue, besides elephants, horses and slaves. His bid was accepted; but his attempt to raise the promised amount made him unpopular, and he was assassinated.[89]

The high degree of centralization of the state achieved under Alauddin Khalji and Muhammad bin Tughluq gave way to a situation in Firuz Tughluq's time, where the nobles came to

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[85] Afif, trans. Jauhri 73-74.
[86] Afif, trans. Jauhri, 257.
[87] Jackson, 305.
[88] Tripathi, 289.
[89] Tripathi 289-90.

acquire full control over the incomes of their revenue assignments, which were often allowed to be inherited by their descendents. The slackening of the centre's control over the assignments of the nobles as well as the organization of their contingents tended to weaken the Sultanate militarily.[90]

The strength and stability of the Sultanate was based on its army organization. Alauddin Khalji raised a strong and well-equipped standing army, paid in cash by the state. He instituted the practice of recording the descriptive roll (*huliya*) of individual soldiers in the army minister's register and to prevent the defrauding of the government by the substitution of a bad horse for a good one, the branding of horses (*dagh* system) was introduced.[91] When Firuz Shah substituted the system of cash payment by the grant of assignments of revenue to the soldiery and made the posts of the soldiers and their officers hereditary, he gave up the basic right of the government to see to the efficiency of its military personnel. Its evil effect was that the descendents of military men ceased to be military men and became pensioners entitled to land revenue from specified villages. After Firuz Shah's death, land revenue could no longer be collected by Delhi owing to rebellious governors, *muqaddams* and Hindu chiefs; for the fear of the army which had made them obedient in the payment of land revenue and tribute, had completely vanished.[92] Firuz Tughluq also "discarded the

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[90] Iqtidar Alam Khan 1.
[91] For the organization of the army under the Delhi Sultans, see Qureshi 136-156.
[92] Habib and Nizami 608.

regulation regarding the record of descriptive rolls, and encouraged absenteeism and proxy" as well as the "evasion of annual muster roll".[93] The entire army establishment came to be infested with the evils of corruption, favouritism and nepotism. Adopting a wholly wrong view of generosity, Firuz turned a blind eye to the prevailing corruption. Afif relates the case of a horseman to whom the king gave a *tanka* of gold so that he could bribe the clerk to pass his sub-standard mount before the year ended.[94] Firuz Tughluq was personally responsible for the decay and deterioration of the once mighty and invincible army of the Delhi empire and its disappearance sealed the fate of the Tughluq dynasty as well as the Sultanate of Delhi.

The liberal policy of Firuz Shah led to bureaucratic independence of the central authority which often led to corruption and nepotism in the administration, as specially Firuz often overlooked even the glaring mistakes of his nobles and ignored complaints of their misconduct. Afif says :

> During the reigns of previous Sultans, even for a minor shortfall in collections or payments due, or in cases of minor embezzlements, the concerned officials were subjected to a variety of punishments including death penalty. Firuz Shah, in his forty years of reign, did not punish any of his officials or functionaries except the *Muqta* of the territory of Mahoba, *Qazi* Sadr-ul-Mulk.[95]

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[93] R.C. Jauhri, *Firoz Tughluq 1351-1388 A.D.*, 2nd ed. (Jalandhar : ABS,1990) 121.
[94] Afif, trans. Jauhri 173-74.
[95] Afif, trans. Jauhri 256.

Moreover, Firuz Shah's weakness fanned mutual rivalries and enmities among the nobles at the court and the history of his successors is a sickening tale of intrigue, counter-intrigues, murders and mutual annihilation of the nobility in order to raise men of its own choice to the throne.[96] "The resultant chaos and disintegration invited Timur's invasion which administered the coup de grace to the moribund empire and the Tughluq dynasty."[97]

III

The concluding years of Firuz Tughluq's reign "were full of tragedies, troubles and turmoils".[98] After his death, constant strife weakened the Sultanate considerably and its authority was challenged everywhere. The incompetent successors of Firuz Shah accelerated the process of disintegration, the seeds of which had been sown during his reign.

A number of princes sat on the throne for a brief time till Nasiruddin Mahmud, who was destined to be the last ruler of the Tughluq dynasty, succeeded in 1394.[99] His claim to sovereignty was disputed by Nusrat Shah, a son of Fateh Khan, the eldest son of Firuz. For some time, there were, thus two

[96] Nigam 90.
[97] Mahdi Husain, *Tughluq Dynasty* 444.
[98] Jauhri, *Firoz Tughluq* 180.
[99] For an account of the successors of Firuz Tughluq, see Muhammad Qasim Ferishta, *Tarikh-i-Ferishta*, Eng. trans. J. Briggs, *History of the Rise of the Mahomedan Power in India*, Vol. I (Calcutta : Cambray, 1966) 466-84.

kings ruling at one and the same time – one at Delhi and the other at Firozabad. They quarreled with each other, as Badaoni says, like the kings of the game of chess.[100] This state of affairs continued for about three years "with astonishing equality; for if one monarch's party had any time the superiority, the balance was soon restored by the neutral chiefs".[101] As a result, "the government fell into anarchy; civil war raged everywhere; and a scene was exhibited, unheard of before, of two kings in arms against each other residing in the same capital".[102]

The Sultanate of Delhi began to disintegrate. Disloyal governors and Hindu chiefs everywhere threw off their allegiance, and defied the authority of the central power, which had become incapable of asserting itself. There was a recrudescence of Hindu revolts particularly in the *Doab*, where *Zamindars* and *khots* withheld tribute and began to play the role of petty despots. As a result, revenue was not realized and the whole administration fell into a state of chaos.[103] The rural as well as the urban population suffered terribly. For a decade after Firuz Shah's death, the princes manoeuvred, the nobles intrigued and the people suffered.[104]

Provincial governors began to assert their independence. The first to do so was the governor of Gujarat, followed by the Khokhars of Punjab, and then Malwa and

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[100] Badaoni, Vol. I 351.
[101] Ferishta, Vol. I 481.
[102] Ferishta, Vol. I 481.
[103] Ishwari Prasad, *History of Medieval India* (Allahabad : Indian Press, 1966) 330.
[104] Lal, Twilight 12.

Khandesh. In 1394 an independent kingdom was carved out in Jaunpur. Moreland says, "The Deccan and Khandesh, Gujarat and Malwa, Bengal and Jaunpur, had become independent kingdoms; Lahore and Delhi were sometimes at variance". As a result, "for the time being there was no opportunity for the revenue administrator to make his mark on the institutions of the country as a whole".[105] Since the various Hindu chiefs had started withholding land revenue, the following proverb became common : "The rule of the Lord of the world (*Khudawand-i-Alam*) is from Dihli to Palam".[106] The disintegration of the Delhi Sultanate was completed by the invasion of Timur in 1398, which gave a death blow to the empire.

Amir Timur Gurgan,[107] who led a terrible campaign into Hindustan in 1398-99, had become master of a great part of Asia in the second half of the fourteenth century. He is sometimes described as "the last nomad chief to establish a political dominion over agricultural and pastoral peoples on an imperial scale. His empire, with Central Asia as its pivot, stretched across Persia, northern India, the Russian Steppes and China".[108] Towards the end of his career, he decided to undertake an expedition to India. He declares in his autobiography that his object in the invasion of Hindustan was "to lead an expedition

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[105] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 62.

[106] Badaoni, Vol. I 351. *Khudawand-i-Alam* was the title of the Sultan of Delhi.

[107] Gurgan was the insignia of the ruling family of Timur. For a discussion on the title, see Mirza Muhammad Haidar Dughlat, *The Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, Eng. trans. N. Elias and E. Denison Ross, *A History of the Moghuls of Central Asia* (Patna : Academica Asiatica, 1973) 278 n.

[108] Syed Jamaluddin, *The State Under Timur A Study in Empire Building* (New Delhi : Har Anand, 1995) 20.

against the infidels" and thereby become a *ghazi*, or a martyr.[109] Another objective was to lay his hands upon the fabulous wealth of the country. Prince Muhammad Sultan told Amir Timur that :

> The whole country of India is full of gold and jewels, and in it there are seventeen mines of gold and silver, diamond and ruby and emerald and tin and iron and steel and copper and quicksilver, etc., and of plants which grow there are those fit for making apparel, and aromatic plants., and sugarcane, and it is a country which is always green and verdant, and the whole aspect of the country is pleasant and delightful.[110]

Mohammad Habib states that Timur's Indian campaign, was planned as a pure plundering raid with an excellent timetable. The campaign had to be finished in the winter months of 1398-99 because he had no time for long sieges.[111] The political anarchy that prevailed in India facilitated Timur's task. His secret agents reported that two brothers Sarang Khan and Mallu Khan were wielding authority at Multan and Delhi respectively, and the young Sultan Mahmud was ineffective.[112] Timur had no desire for a permanent conquest and occupation of India. Booty, tribute, and nominal domination may have been sufficient objectives for his expedition to India.[113]

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[109] Timur, *Malfuzat-i-Timuri* or *Tuzak-i-Timuri*, Eng. trans. Elliot and Dowson, Vol. III (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, n.d.) 394.
[110] Timur 306-7.
[111] Habib and Nizami 119.
[112] Sharafuddin Yazdi, *Zafarnama*, Eng. trans. Elliot and Dowson, Vol. III (Allahabad : Kitab Mahal, n.d.) 480.
[113] Jamaluddin 103.

The countryside through which Timur passed in the course of his long and double route from the Indus to Delhi and back, suffered greatly. The *rabi* crops standing in the fields were destroyed and stores of grain were looted. Provisions had to be found for his soldiers by the plunder of helpless small towns and villages. The advance guard of his army was sent under his grandson, Pir Muhammad, who besieged and conquered Multan early in 1398.

Timur himself started from Samarqand in April 1398 and, crossing the Indus, Jhelum and Ravi, besieged Tulamba 52 miles north-east of Multan, in October 1398.[114] He demanded from the inhabitants two lakhs as ransom; the *ulama* and the *shaikhs* were to be exempted from payment. While the balance was being realized, he ordered his soldiers to sieze grain wherever they could find it. The soldiers "plundered an enormous number of granaries",[115] set fire to the houses, plundered whatever they could lay their hands on, sparing only the religious scholars and the *Saiyyids*.[116]

Timur reached in the vicinity of Delhi in December after travelling via Pakpattan, Dipalpur, Bhatnir, Fatehabad, Sirsa, Sunam, Kaithal and Panipat; plundering and burning the country and massacring the people on the way. In the village of Shahnawaz, for instance, large stores of grain were found. Sharafuddin Yazdi writes that the soldiers "carried off all they

[114] Timur 409-13.
[115] Timur 414.
[116] Yazdi 484.

could, and under the royal command set fire to what was left so that it might not benefit the infidels".[117] Similarly, at Ahroni, the soldiers brought away large quantities of grain and the houses and buildings were set on fire. In the village Tohana, 200 *jats* were put to the sword, the rest were made prisoners and a large stock of cattle was captured.[118]

When Timur and his army reached Jahannuma, about six miles from old Delhi, the soldiers "ravaged the country from the village of Kanhi-gazin to Jahan-numai".[119] The people were killed and valuables and cattle were carried away. Timur crossed the river Yamuna, and entered the *Doab*, "sweeping the greater part of the country with the bitter whirlwind of rapine and pillage".[120] The inhabitants of the towns and villages, both Hindus and Muslims ran away to the mountains or the jungles, while some took shelter in the fort of Delhi.[121] Timur fought and defeated Sultan Mahmud and occupied Delhi on 18th December 1398. The notables of Delhi waited on the conqueror and begged quarter. Timur agreed to spare the citizens; but owing to the oppressive conduct of the soldiers, the people of the city were obliged to offer resistance. Timur then ordered a general massacre of the population of Delhi which continued for five days. Gold and silver in coins and bullion, gold and silver ornaments of women captives, precious stones and brocades and

[117] Yazdi 485. For the location of Shahnawaz see S.H. Hodivala, *Studies in Indo Muslim History* (Bombay : Popular, 1939) 351.
[118] Timur 428-29.
[119] Yazdi 495. Jahannuma was the place constructed by Firuz Tughluq on the banks of the Yamuna.
[120] Badaoni, Vol. I 355-56.
[121] Sihrindi 172.

silks of great value were obtained in great quantities.[122]

Grain and fodder were looted for the requirements of the army on Timur's return march from Delhi. He passed through Meerut, Hardwar, Kangra and Jammu, plundering and sacking the towns and villages through which he passed.[123] Before leaving, Timur appointed Khizr Khan, erstwhile governor of Multan, who had been expelled from there by his rival, Sarang Khan, as the governor of Lahore, Multan and Dipalpur.[124]

After the departure of Timur, there was utter confusion and misery throughout northern India. It has been observed that Timur had inflicted "on India more misery than had ever before been inflicted by any conqueror in a single invasion".[125] His campaign was marked throughout by indiscriminate loot and plunder. Stanley Lanepoole observes :

> When the Scourge of God had departed, men came out of their hiding-places like the hare when the hunter has passed. Fortunately in his haste to return to Samarkand, Timur had been able to carry but a small part of India; but wherever his army had trampled, from the Indus to the Ganges, over the whole of the Panjab, desolation and famine were left behind, Thenceforward, until the days of the *Moghul* empire, Delhi never regained her lost ascendancy.[126]

[122] Timur 446.
[123] Yazdi 505-519.
[124] Badaoni, Vol. I 358-59.
[125] Wolseley Haig, *The Cambridge History of India*, Vol. III (New Delhi : S. Chand, 1971) 200.
[126] Lanepoole 121.

Delhi was almost depopulated and the few that remained were severely affected by famine and pestilence. Famine and pestilence fell upon Delhi so that the city was utterly ruined, and "those of the inhabitants who were left died, while for two whole months not a bird moved a wing in Delhi".[127] The socio-economic life of the people was dislocated; agriculture and industry stood still and the morale of the people went under. Famine and pestilence destroyed men and decimated cattle, and caused a suspension of the agricultural industry.[128]

The Sultanate of Delhi, which had already been broken up into fragments before Timur's invasion, was now shrunk to the dimension of a petty principality comprising the capital city and a few districts around it. The victor had not gained much, but the vanquished had lost everything. "The Sultan of Delhi was a fugitive, the nobles were dispersed, and the Tughluq monarchy, which had rapidly declined during the last decade was now beyond any hope of redemption."[129] After being defeated by Timur, Sultan Mahmud and his minister, Mallu Iqbal Khan had fled from Delhi. On Timur's departure, Nusrat Shah, a pretender to the throne captured Delhi but was ousted by Mallu Khan.[130] Mallu Iqbal Khan recovered control over some parts of the *Doab* but the provinces which had become independent during the civil wars still remained cut off from the capital. Gujarat, Malwa and Jaunpur became powerful

[127] Badaoni, Vol. I 359.
[128] Prasad, *Medieval India* 344.
[129] Lal, *Twilight* 42.
[130] Badaoni, Vol. I 359.

independent principalities, while Lahore, Dipalpur, Multan and parts of Sind were held by Khizr Khan on behalf of Timur. A large number of smaller independent principalities such as, Samana, Bayana, Kalpi and Mahoba, grew on all sides.[131] In 1401 Mallu Iqbal invited Sultan Mahmud back to Delhi and kept him a puppet in his hands. Mahmud was freed from Mallu's tutelage in 1405, but he failed to consolidate his authority and died in 1412. The Tughluq dynasty, thus came to an end and in 1414 Khizr Khan acquired possession of Delhi and laid the foundation of the Saiyyid dynasty.

Under the Saiyyids, land revenue could be collected only at the point of the bayonet. Almost yearly campaigns were undertaken to extort the annual tribute from the Hindu *raja* of Katehr, from Mewat on the South, and from Etawa in the *Doab*.[132] The yearly collection of revenue at the point of the bayonet was not a happy affair. It exasperated the local chiefs and the state could not be sure of a regular revenue due to which its finances remained shaky.[133] In the early part of the fifteenth century no agrarian measures seem to have been instituted, still less, enforced. Each *iqtadar* or Hindu chief collected the revenue of his little kingdom "very much as he chose".[134]

The Lodi Sultans (1451-1526) gave larger grants to individuals than had earlier been the custom. Even 'governors' of the provinces were in reality holders of large assignments at

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[131] Ferishta, Vol. I 498.
[132] Lanepoole 122.
[133] Lal, *Twilight* 83.
[134] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 67.

strategic points in the province.[135] The political and economic strength of the central government as embodied in the person of the Sultan was greatly reduced. The tribal nobility retained nearly all the two major sources of state income – land revenue and the enormous sums gained in plunder or in tribute.[136] The economic weakness of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century Sultanate is attested by the discontinuance of silver and gold coinage under the Lodi Sultans and the employment of baser metals such as billon and copper.[137] By the turn of the fourteenth century precious metal coinage had practically disappeared. Under the Lodi Sultans, a point was reached where the streak of silver left in the coin earned it the designation of *tanka i siyah* (black *tanka*), while the pre-existing pure silver coin was qualified as *tanka i nuqra* (silver *tanka*).[138] This economic weakness of the Sultanate in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century was due to the fact that it had forfeited control of much of its land revenue and no longer enjoyed access to the enormous sums gained in plunder or tribute during the Khalji and Tughluqid eras.[139] The Lodi kingdom, described by Erskine – not inaccurately – as "a congeries of nearly independent principalities, *jagirs* and provinces, each ruled by a hereditary

135 John F. Richards, "The Economic History of the Lodi Period : 1451-1526" in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ed., *Money and Market in India 1100-1700* (Delhi : O UP, 1998) 150-52.
136 For the relations of the Lodi Sultans with their nobles, see Iqtidar Husain Siddiqui, *Some Aspects of Afghan Despotism in India* (Aligarh : Three Men, 1969) chapters 1-2.
137 Vincent A. Smith, *The Oxford History of India*, 3rd ed. (Delhi : OUP, 1958) 263.
138 See Najaf Haidar, "The Fourteenth Century Coinage : Silver Crisis", Unpublished Proceedings of *Seminar on Economic History of Medieval India* Aligarh (1-3 February 2003) 10-11.
139 Jackson 325.

chief or by a *zamindar* or delegate from Delhi, failed to survive Babur's blow at Panipat".[140]

In the decay, dismemberment and final end of the Delhi Sultanate, agrarian factors were entwined with socio-political and structural like they were to be in the fall of the Mughal empire, the extent of each factor and variation, not withstanding. The political disintegration of the period had significant agrarian implications to the extent that it possibly contributed to making the hereditary rural potentates more influential within the existing political systems. The rise of the *zamindar* class in a major part of the subcontinent was one of the important manifestations of this development.[141]

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[140] William Erskine, *A History of India Under the First Two Sovereigns of the House of Taimur, Babur and Humayun*, Vol. I (Delhi : IAD, 1973) 406.
[141] Iqtadar Alam Khan 5.

CONCLUSION

At the commencement of the Turkish rule in northern India, the main features of the indigenous agrarian system consisted of measurement of land, assessment of the produce of the soil and collection of land revenue both in cash and kind. Normally the state share of the produce was 1/6 but it could be raised to 1/4 in special circumstances.[1] Assignments of land to charitable and religious institutions as well as to the state officials were common. The rulers realized other taxes besides the land revenue like *bali* and *kara* and advanced loans for seeds and implements. The ownership of land, it appears, lay with the cultivators in general.[2] Towards the end of 'Hindu' rule in Northern India, the fiscal burden on the cultivator had increased. In theory, land revenue was only one-sixth of the gross produce, but other taxes seem to have put tremendous pressure on the peasant which was, perhaps, not very different from what he was to face during most of the Sultanate period.[3]

The Islamic conquerors, on the other hand, brought with them the ideas of an agrarian system of their own which were in consonance with the Islamic law and not subject to alteration by the kings. There were many similarities between the Islamic agrarian system and the indigenous 'Hindu' system.

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[1] D.N.Jha, *Revenue System in Post Maurya and Gupta Times* (Calcutta : Punthi Pustak, 1967) 40-41.

[2] Yadava, *Society and Culture* 250-256.

[3] Qureshi, *Administration of the Delhi Sultanate* 112. For the burden of taxation, see Yadava, *Society and Culture* 288-301; Lallanji Gopal, *Economic Life of Northern India* 250-53; Irfan Habib *Essays* 137-38.

Regarding the influence exercised by the ancient Indian revenue system upon subsequent times, U.N. Ghoshal writes that the institutions of the Hindu rulers in early times anticipated in many points, and notably in the domain of land-revenue, the methods and arrangements of their Islamic successors. According to him, "many of the revenue institutions of ancient India, far from being swept away by the shock of the Moslem conquest, actually received a new lease of life after that catastrophe".[4]

There was no fundamental inconsistency between the Islamic idea of *kharaj* and the old 'Hindu' principle that the king was entitled to a share of the produce of land. Difficulties, however, might arise in regard to the proportion of the royal share to the cultivator's share as also in respect of the methods of assessment and collection. The other similarities were : assessment of the produce by sharing or by measurement, collection of land revenue both in cash and kind, existence of subordinate chiefs or ex-kings paying revenue to a superior, assignments of land to state officials instead of paying cash, grants to charitable, religious or educational institutions,[5] granting of exemptions or remissions in collection of land revenue. These institutions continued with minor adjustments and changes in nomenclature. Arabic or Persian names were given to the institutions found in existence and in some cases, the Indian names continued or eventually ousted the imported

[4] Ghoshal, *Hindu Revenue System* 378-79.

[5] Land grants were made to *brahmanas* from the first century onwards. Sharma, *Indian Feudalism* 263.

designations. According to Moreland, "the facts point to a fusion worked out by practical men, and not by theoretical jurists, men whose immediate object was to get in the revenue" and who were "ready to follow the line of least resistance, rather than seek guidance from the *Qazis* and other professed expounders of Islamic law".[6]

There were aspects wherein the Islamic system differed or had inherent implications for the non-Islamic subjects. In these cases, the Indianization of certain Islamic norms on the subject took place.[7] As land revenue was the main source of income of the state, the Turkish rulers could not reorganize the agrarian system according to strict Islamic principles without exposing their financial system to grave risks. An example, in this case, is the distinction between *ushri* and *kharaji* or tithe land and tribute land. This process was not followed in India, at least not to any appreciable extent. Qutbuddin Aibak is reported to have reintroduced the distinction between *kharaji* and *ushri*. He ordered that all the lands possessed by Muslims should be treated as *ushri* and he prescribed for them a reduced rate of revenue, viz., one-tenth or one-twentieth of the produce.[8] There are references to *ushri* lands in the reign of Firuz Tughluq but these are exceptions. After the increase in the number of Muslims, the rulers in general were

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[6] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 19.

[7] See Kiran Pawar, "Indianization of Kharaj", in Kiran Pawar and Sanjay Subodh, ed., *Studies in History*, Commemorative Volume in Honour of Prof. R.C.Jauhri (Jalandhar : ABS, 2002) 8, 10.

[8] Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah, *Tarikh-i-Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah*, trans. and ed. E. Denison Ross (London : Royal Asiatic Society, 1927) 33-34.

reluctant to designate the land held by new converts as *ushri* because it meant considerable loss to the exchequer. Another point in this context was that the maximum Islamic claim to land revenue [9] was at variance with the arithmetical limitation to 1/6 or 1/4 in an emergency as recognized by Hindu law. Though Moreland has found no serious obstacle for the conquerors to enforce their demand, yet a significant impact of this aspect was considerable enhancement of taxes for the peasant. The rulers right from the time of Qutbuddin Aibak had sought to abolish the extra-*Shariat* taxation but it is a known fact that the peasantry was subjected to extra cesses like *ghari* and *charai*. Even under Sher Shah, *jaribana* (surveyor's fee) and *muhassalana* (tax-collectors fee) that ranged from 2.5% to 5% of revenue and an additional cess of 2.5% of the entire revenue payable by him, along with 1/3 of the average produce meant, a heavy burden on the peasantry. This partial continuation of the indigenous tradition of charging extra cesses[10] along with higher rates of land revenue in general, meant more surplus for the state and bureaucracy and less share for the cultivator.

Another departure from the Islamic concept was regarding the revenue collection agencies – not only were the *zimmis* allowed to be the major collectors of land revenue, they played a significant role during the Sultanate period. The Turkish state in India could not possibly dispense with the services of the Hindus employed in the various branches of

[9] See Tripathi, *Some Aspects of Muslim Administration* 343.
[10] Lallanji Gopal, *Economic Life of Northern India*. 32-70.

administration particularly at the lower levels. They fully realized that the indigenous institutions could be run by the Indians who alone could help the new government in the collection of revenues and act as intermediaries between the state and the peasantry. These Hindu intermediaries were the *rais*, *ranas* and *rawats*[11] – the rural aristocracy and the *khots*, *muqaddams* and *chaudharis* who functioned as the revenue collection agencies in the areas under Muslim governors. Tara Chand writes, "When Qutbuddin Aibak decided to stay in Hindustan he had no other choice but to retain the Hindu staff which was familiar with the Hindu administration, for without it all government including the collection of revenue would have fallen into utter chaos".[12]

The question arises – what were the agrarian changes accompanying the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate ? What were the agrarian measures introduced by the various Sultans for the functioning of the land-revenue administration and to what extent did State policy influence agrarian prosperity or decline. The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate came in the wake of a prolonged period of political fragmentation and it signified fundamental changes in the region's economy as well. The innovations which mark out the history of the Sultanate as a distinct phase in India's economic evolution were : the successful creation of a military power sustained by the regular

[11] They are referred to in the inscriptions of the period. Pushpa Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions of Delhi Sultanate 1191-1526* (Delhi : OUP, 1990) xxii-xxiv.
[12] Tara Chand, *Influence of Islam on Indian Culture* 137.

extraction of resources from an extensive territory; the emergence of a new ruling class with direct claims over shares of the produce; a proliferation of urban centres; the growth of new manufactures like paper and lime mortar and the introduction of some new technology.[13] In the agrarian sector the *iqta* and the *kharaj* were the two chief instruments of change. The *iqta* provided for rigorous centralization which gave the Sultan's government immense power over society. It was thus, an important factor in enabling the state to demand a large share of the surplus product of society. This share pre-eminently took the form of *kharaj* which had come to signify, in the form of a land tax, the sovereign's claim to the bulk of the surplus produced by the peasant above the minimum needed for his subsistence.[14] It was only the possibility of complete devastation of the peasantry which set any limits to its magnitude.[15]

There was hardly any change in the structure of rural society during the thirteenth century. There was no widespread dislocation of the old economic and social systems and "the stream of life in the rural areas flowed smoothly and uninterruptedly even after the establishment of Turkish rule".[16] The early Turkish rulers depended on the Hindu chiefs to pay the land-revenue, leaving it to them to collect it from the peasants according to the existing practices. The revenue from the rural areas could often only be realized at the point of the sword. The

[13] *Cambridge Economic History of India*, Vol. I xiii.
[14] Irfan Habib, *Economic History of Medieval India* 10.
[15] Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia 74-75.*
[16] Nizami, *Religion and Politics* 341.

imposition of *kharaj* in its full-blown form took time. The economic basis of the Sultanate, thus, remained weak in the thirteenth century.[17]

The fourteenth century saw a number of new developments as seen in the course of our study. The planned imperialistic economic policy of Alauddin Khalji was undoubtedly "the outcome of an urgent and grave political situation which forced itself on the attention of the king".[18] His pricing policy was abandoned by the later Sultans. But to him goes the credit of establishing a uniform system of taxation throughout a large region of northern India and firmly establishing the tradition of the realization of the three basic agrarian taxes – *kharaj*, *charai* and *ghari*. Alauddin's taxation system was probably the one institution from his reign that lasted the longest, surviving into the nineteenth and even the twentieth century. Since the new land revenue system[19] enabled the Sultanate ruling class to approximate the bulk of the country's surplus, the fiscal claims of the previous aristocracy could not be permitted. Thus the *khots* and *muqaddams* were prohibited from levying their own cesses (*qismat-i khoti*). Alauddin Khalji even taxed the *khots* and *muqaddams* but Ghiyasuddin Tughluq modified Alauddin's system by giving certain concessions to the *khots* and *muqaddams*.

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[17] Irfan Habib, " Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries ", Unpublished Proceedings of *Seminar on Economic History of Medieval India* Aligarh (1-3 February 2003) : 8.

[18] Saran 149.

[19] The difference between this new land tax and the pre-medieval assemblage of a 'formidable number of taxes and cesses' lay in the tax being a single claim on the bulk of the surplus. Probably the size of the total burden which the peasant had borne previously did not change. See Irfan Habib, *Essays* 147.

Two measures taken by Ghiyasuddin had a long term impact on the agrarian policy of the Sultanate. Firstly, the system of crop-sharing (*hasil*) was restored by him as opposed to the system of measurement (*masahat*) of Alauddin Khalji which was considered as an innovation. The method of measurement was not restored till the reign of Sher Shah. Secondly, the restoration of the Hindu revenue-collectors became a permanent feature of the agrarian system, for there is clear historical continuity between them and the later *zamindars* of the Mughal and British periods. As Moreland points out, Barani and Afif employ the term for any chief found outside, as well as inside, the Sultanate.[20] But a different sense, that of the holder of any superior right over land, and so not necessarily implying possession of political authority, was already developing. During the Mughal period the term *zamindar* was applied to revenue-collectors (successors of *chaudharis*, *khots* and *muqaddams*) as also to payers of tribute, e.g., the Rajput princes.[21]

Muhammad Tughluq tried to revive the system of Alauddin Khalji but he could hardly achieve any success and reverted back to the system of granting revenue assignments. Firuz Shah's reign witnessed several significant departures from the existing agrarian policy. On coming to the throne, he granted a series of fiscal concessions to the people who had suffered terribly from over-taxation, rigorous administration and natural calamities. However, his policy of assigning away lands in *iqtas*,

[20] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 18.
[21] See Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System* 169-174.

assigning villages even to individual troopers, the further extension of the farming system, recognition of the hereditary principle in the services rendered the administration hollow from within and encouraged the provincial governors to defy the governmental authority and signal the total disruption of the Sultanate. After the death of Firuz Tughluq decline set in, followed by the invasion of Timur and founding of various kingdoms each taking away a large chunk out of the territories of the empire.[22] The circumstances, therefore, hardly left any scope for implementation of any general agrarian measures.

We do not find one uniform pattern of revenue system during the entire Sultanate period. It varied from time to time due to different problems arising at different times and also due to the "divergent aims, mentality and personality of the Sultans".[23] Land-revenue, however remained heavy hovering in the neighbourhood of half. This was the first time that such a high magnitude of land revenue was assessed and collected from a large and highly fertile area for several decades. The change to a cash nexus was again a major new feature of the agrarian economy. Since the Sultanate ruling class, unlike in the previous period, was mainly urban in character, the *iqta* holders had a strong tendency to commute their revenues into cash.

It would be an overstatement to say that nothing changed in the agrarian scene under the Sultanate except for the

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[22] A.B. Pandey, *Early Medieval India* (Allahabad : Central Book Depot, 1974 reprint) 225-31.

[23] U.N. Day, *The Government of the Sultanate*, 2nd ed. (New Delhi : Munshiram, 1993) 77.

intrusion of a heavy land tax. The heavy tax itself committed the state to an interest in improvement of cultivation. As pointed out by K.M. Ashraf, "any big improvement in the method of production, a more equitable distribution of the economic wealth or a better adjustment of the economic position of the various social classes was outside the policy of the state".[24] The Sultans did initiate measures for the welfare of the cultivators and relief in times of extreme distress, like drought and famine. Political disturbances, wars and invasions and the indifference of the State could easily be expected to have dislocated and hampered agricultural work. Likewise, a realization of its own interest led the State to promote agriculture in a number of ways. The Delhi Sultans looked upon cultivation as the primary source of wealth and encouraged extension of cultivation for greater revenue returns. Later, along with the reclamation of land, improvement in cropping patterns was also encouraged; again to increase yields and therefore revenue returns. The cultivators were urged and induced materially to shift over to valuable crops, such as cotton, sugarcane, poppy and indigo. For the first time in the fourteenth century we find the substitution of high-priced crops for low-grade crops meant for local consumption being regarded as an object of State policy. Four kinds of land were reclaimed during the period : (i) cultivable waste, (ii) forest or areas covered with thick vegetation, such as the upper *Doab* region in the thirteenth century, (iii) dry or arid tracts though possessing

[24] Ashraf, *Life and Conditions* 116-17.

high fertility potential, such as the Jamuna-Sutlej area till mid-14th century, (iv) swampy lowland such as the Shiwalik foothills or around Bhakkar in Sind.[25]

Muhammad bin Tughluq was the first Sultan to formulate a systematic policy for promoting agriculture. Besides encouraging improvement in cropping patterns, he started the practice of granting of agricultural loans or *sondhar* to the cultivators to provide them with the elementary means of production. Though the Sultan's scheme fell through, the idea itself was sound and improvement in cropping pattern was henceforth adopted by the State as regular policy.

The Delhi Sultans were alive to the irrigational needs and paid attention to the digging of canals. It was well understood that larger areas brought under cultivation and better quality crops would produce more revenue. Ghiyasuddin Tughluq was probably the first Sultan who thought of opening canals but the first large-scale irrigation activity was recorded for the reign of Firuz Shah. As pointed by Edward Thomas :

> His canals, his best and most enduring gift were confessedly prompted not by any kindly desire to aid and succour his subjects, but to make existence possible in the new towns his early Bhatti predilections induced him to found in the deserts of Hansi, and the commercial element in these beneficencies crops up amusingly when he seeks for ecclesiastical sanction for his share of ten percent on the outlay.[26]

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[25] Naqvi, *Agricultural Dynamism* 29-34.
[26] Thomas, *Chronicles* 274.

Despite the defects in Firuz Shah's fiscal and revenue policy, its immediate results were increase and extension of agriculture, cultivation of superior crops, progress of trade, cheapness of commodities, material prosperity of the common peasants and increase in State revenue.

Some developments took place in the field of agricultural technology but they did not lead even remotely to a technological revolution. The Muslims improved the ancient Indian *araghatta*, the precursor of the Persian wheel, for irrigation purposes. By the time Babur arrived in India, it was mechanically more sophisticated. The growing demand for different varieties of cloth stepped up the use of the bow-string for carding cotton and of the spinning-wheel. Refined sugar was also much in demand. The use of cementing lime which arrived with the Muslims made indigo extraction easier and liquor distillation added a new and widespread agricultural industry. Mulberry trees, silk worms and cocoons were introduced into Bengal by the fifteenth century and silk weaving, thus made rapid progress. There are scattered references to the extensive cultivation of foodgrains and other crops, nurture of fruit trees and rearing of domestic animals. Firuz Tughluq's programme of laying gardens in the vicinity of Delhi and some other places, promoted general improvement in the quality of fruits.

The Delhi Sultans promoted trade and commerce by building new roads and ensuring the safety of trade routes, patronizing merchants and traders, appointing merchants as state agents for the purchase of certain commodities and following a

liberal policy of commercial taxation. The villagers were to make efforts to extend cultivation in order to ensure a mounting volume of agricultural yield to keep the rural and urban consumer satisfied with supplies of foodgrains as well as raw materials required for agro-based crafts. Rural and urban linkages were being constantly improved for the movements of merchants and merchandise although the progress was slow and erratic. The growth of commerce under the Sultans is reflected preeminently in their coinage.[27] Signs of monetary expansion can be seen in the establishment of a multi-metallic currency system (gold, silver, billon and copper) and the reliance of the ruling class on money lenders (*sarrafs*), who were paid in drafts (*qabz-ha*) drawn on the revenues against their loans. Subsequently, "the collection of land revenue in money, growing urbanization and handicraft production, and a rise in inland and overseas commerce were reflected in enlarged currency output and circulation till at least the middle of the fourteenth century".[28] The great abundance of coins found in the Salt-Range districts points to intensive trade carried on by merchant caravans between India, Iran and Central Asia through this region.[29] The establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, the growth of towns and their industries, the security of roads, the elimination of internal

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[27] The coinage in gold and silver increased greatly especially under Alauddin Khalji. See Shireen Moosvi, "Numismatic Evidence and the Economic History of the Delhi Sultanate", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* Gorakhpur (1989-90) 207-18.

[28] Najaf Haider, "The Fourteenth Century Coinage : Silver Crisis", Unpublished Proceedings of *Seminar on Economic History of Medieval India* Aligarh (1-3 February 2003) :1.

[29] Andre Wink, *Al-Hind, Vol. II* 215.

taxes – greatly contributed to the growth of the Hindu mercantile community. Alauddin Khalji, while organizing his economic reforms, had to depend on the Hindu *nayaks* for grain and the Hindu merchants of Multan for cloth. The merchants had gained immense wealth by advancing loans to Balban's nobles and by long distance trade under Alauddin Khalji.[30] The large export of grain and other produce from the country, caused by the exaction of revenue, maintained a class of specialized grain merchants – *karvanis* or *banjaras* of the later period.

The agrarian changes under the Delhi Sultans spelled no relaxation in the pressure on the peasantry. The peasants toiled hard almost day and night during certain seasons of the year. Amir Khusrau writes that "the hopeful cultivators dig the earth and saturate it with the drops of their sweats rather than those of the rains and sow pearls on the ground with every drop from their brow. They come out in the form of fruits and produces".[31] The abundance of land helped to check the relentless exploitation of the peasantry but the State tried its best to appropriate the maximum rural surplus. The peasants were left with means of bare subsistence and for many of them, life was a battle for mere survival.

The legacy of the Delhi Sultans was bequeathed to the Great Mughals (1526-1707A.D.), who followed the fundamentals of the agrarian policies of the Sultans except for minor adjustments, variations or occasional modifications. There is

[30] P. Prasad, *Sanskrit Inscriptions* xxvii, 7.
[31] Askari, *Amir Khusrau as a Historian* 86.

nothing in the literature of the period to indicate that either Babur or Humayun made any alterations in the agrarian system of northern India. In the few years of Babur's life in India, he was preoccupied with the north-west and Central Asia which did not give him enough time to familiarise himself with Indian conditions and experiment with reforms. Besides, although he had able generals, he did not have a Todarmal to advise him on agrarian matters. As regards the mode of assessment and collection of revenue, Babur seems to have retained the system of the Lodis, but he must have made it more efficient by his strict supervision over his officers and by his constant advice to them to be just and benevolent.[32]

Babur took over the government from the Afghans without necessarily intending to change the revenue system. The list of the revenues of Hindustan given in Babur's memoirs suggests that he laid his hands on the papers of the Lodi government and made it the basis of his demands.[33] The *khalisa*, the *jagir* as well as the *madad-i-maash* or *sayurghal* (grants to religious persons) existed under Babur. Babur made assignments of territory to his officers from which they were entitled to collect their *wajh* (allowance) as fixed by him. A fairly good portion of the land was reserved as *khalisa*. Thus, the Bihar revenue was given to Muhammad Zaman but one crore and twenty five lakh *tankas* were reserved for *Khalisa*.[34] Under

[32] Mohibbul Hasan, *Babur* 157, 171.
[33] *Baburnama* 521.
[34] *Baburnama* 578-79, 663, 676.

Humayun, the assignments given by his father were confirmed and new assignments were made in Bengal and elsewhere. No change seems to have taken place in the methods or machinery of revenue collection.[35]

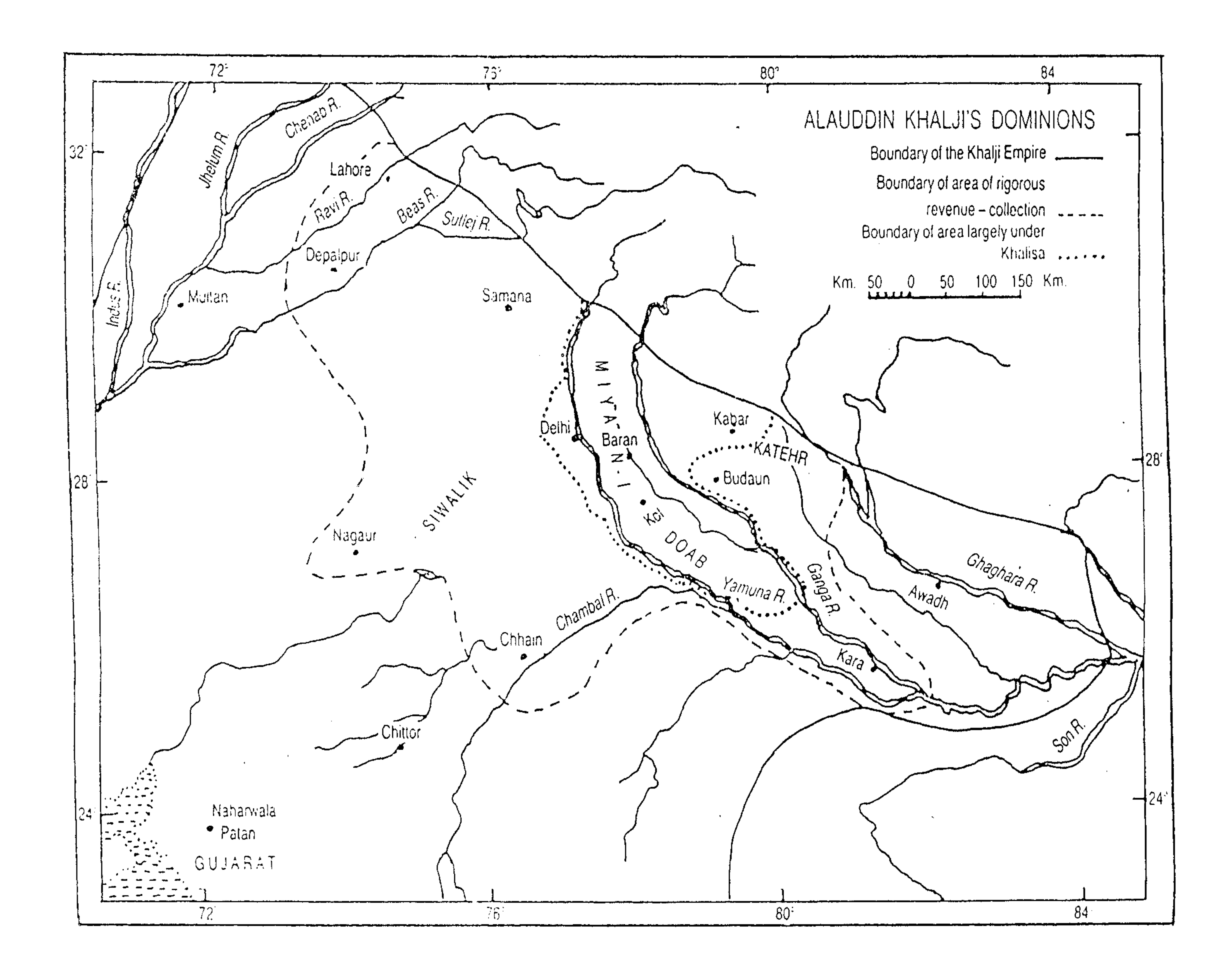
Akbar's long reign (1556-1605) witnessed an entire overhauling of the administration. Modifications were introduced by Akbar in the revenue administration after a series of experiments. However, "the old machinery of the government, and the time honoured customs and procedures that had survived so many changes of dynasties and shocks of revolution must have passed on as legacy of their predecessors to Akbar".[36] Akbar began his reign by adopting Sher Shah's methods, "and changed them only when they had definitely broken down".[37] The changes which took place were within a broad framework of continuity in the fundamentals of agrarian system but noticeable still through a series of changes in administrative organisation, commerce and technique and productivity.[38]

[35] Elliot and Dowson, Vol. V 123, 141.
[36] Tripathi, *Some Aspects* 308.
[37] Moreland, *Agrarian System* 78.
[38] For details see Irfan Habib, *Agrarian System* Chapter I & Chapter VI.

APPENDIX I

AREA OF OPERATION OF ALAUDDIN'S LAND-TAX POLICY

Alauddin Khalji's new taxation system was imposed over a very large region extending from Lahore to Kara and from Katehar to Nagaur with the environs of Delhi at its core, as shown in the map below.



Source : Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ed., *Money and Market in India 1100-1700* (Delhi : OUP, 1998) 90.

APPENDIX II

LAND RECLAIMED IN THE SULTANATE c. 1200-1400

	Area	Nature of Land	Impulse	Process Adopted	Subsequent Utilization	Agency	Remarks
1	Neighbour hood of Delhi	Full of dense jungles	Routing the Mewatis who were a risk for Delhi city, hazardous route to Delhi for caravans and merchants	Jungles were cleared, a fort built at Gopalgir and several posts set up under Afghans with assignments of land for their maintenance	Eliminated the Mewatis, brought the land under the plough	Sultan Balban	Permanently reclaimed
2	The *Doab*	Full of jungles and thick vegetation	To clear the jungles infested with Mewatis and suppress all lawless proceedings	Forest cut, forts built at Kampil, Patiali and Bhojpur and placed incharge of Afghan garrisons, cultivable lands set apart for garrisons	Roads in the area cleared for caravans and merchants to pass, land brought under plough	Sultan Balban	Permanently reclaimed
3	Lahore environs	Devastated and laid waste by Mongols	Political security and extension of land under crop	Rebuilt Lahore fort, architects and managers appointed to superintend restoration	Reclaimed the Lahore districts for cultivation	Sultan Balban	Reclamation fleeting

4	Multan district, Malikpur, Khaikarah, Kanjrut and Jandalah	Arid waste	To bring the land under crop	Introduced canals and channels?	Brought under plough	Ainul-Mulk Mahru	Production doubled
5	Between Kalpi and Firozabad Delhi	Arid waste	To bring under crop	Bhikan canal cut from river Chambal that joined river Jamuna at Firozabad-Delhi	Brought under plough	Sultan Firuz Shah	_
6	*Doab* region extending from Sarkoda hill and Kharla to Koil	Arid waste	To bring under crop	Fifty two new settlements sprang up in the *Doab*	The entire area was brought under crop	Sultan Firuz Shah	No land was without cultivation
7	Hissar Firozah	Dry-single harvest land	To reclaim it	Two canals dug; Rajiwah from Yamuna and Ulughkhani from Sutlej with their confluence at Karnal, to bring water to the city of Hissar Firozah	In the previously arid area, both the season crops, *Rabi* and *Kharif* began to flourish instead of only *Kharif* crops. Trees and gardens were planted producing oranges, all season fruits, sugarcane, Indian cane, flowers etc.	Sultan Firuz Shah	_

8	*Mauza* Mandal n. of Ajmer	Dry	To reclaim it	By assigning it in endowment	_	Sh. Fakhruddin (in the 13th century)	_
9	*Mauza* Siwali n. of Nagor	Dry	_	Dug out the land, brought under plough	_	Sh. Hamiduddin Nagori	Two *tanab* of land
10	Six miles from Delhi	Uncultivated, dry piece of land	To reclaim it	Deep cavern dug into which water was brought from river Yamuna to cultivate that land	Rich produce, extremely responsive soil	Assigned to *Shaikh* Shihabud-din by Sultan Muhammad Tughluq	Great wealth was amassed from the yield of the land
11	*Mauza* Fasur	Uncultivated, deserted	To reclaim and populate	Assigned in *inam*	_	To Sultan Shamsuddin by Sultan Alauddin Khalji	_

Sources : Barani, *Tarikh* 104-7; Mahru, *Insha-i-Mahru* 82, 93; Afif, *Tarikh-i-Firoz Shahi*, 92, 170-171;Battuta, Rehla 87, 147. Also Naqvi, *Agricultural, Industrial and Urban Dynamism under the Sultans of Delhi* 32-34.

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